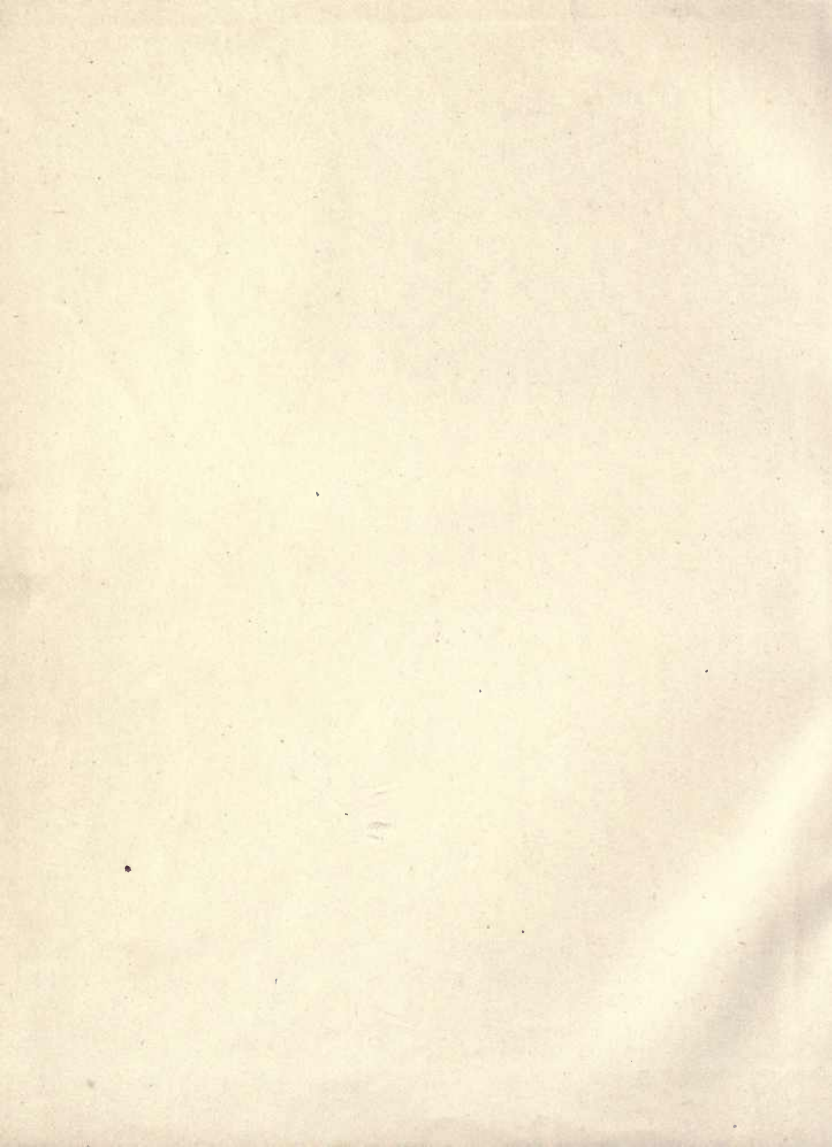


Second Issue









"Even as she thought about it the old hooded waggon came lumbering down among the snow-drifts." (Page 118.)

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1959

A GREAT EMERGENCY.

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

JULIANA HORATIA EWING,

AUTHOR OF

"A FLAT IRON FOR A FARTHING," "SIX TO SIXTEEN," ETC., ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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1886.

A GREAT EMERGENCY

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Dedicated to
JOHN,
LORD BISHOP OF FREDERICTON,
AND TO HIS DEAR WIFE
MARGARET,
IN PLEASANT AND GRATEFUL MEMORY OF
NEW BRUNSWICK,
By J. H. E.

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A GREAT EMERGENCY.

"Send danger from the east unto the west,
So honour cross it from the north to south,
And let them grapple!"

K. Henry IV., Act I.

A GREAT EMERGENCY.

CHAPTER I.

RUPERT'S LECTURES—THE OLD YELLOW LEATHER BOOK.

WE were very happy—I, Rupert, Henrietta, and Baby Cecil. The only thing we found fault with in our lives was that there were so few events in them.

It was particularly provoking, because we were so well prepared for events—any events. Rupert prepared us. He had found a fat old book in the garret, bound in yellow leather, at the end of which were "Directions how to act with presence of mind in any emergency;" and he gave lectures out of this in the kitchen garden.

Rupert was twelve years old. He was the eldest. Then came Henrietta, then I, and last of all Baby Cecil, who was only four. The day I was nine years old, Rupert came into the nursery, holding up his handsome head with the dignified air which became him so well, that I had more than once tried to put it on myself before the nursery looking-glass, and said to me, "You are quite old enough now, Charlie, to learn what to do whatever happens; so every half-holiday, when I am not playing cricket, I'll teach you presence of mind near the cucumber frame, if you're punctual. I've put up a bench."

I thanked him warmly, and the next day he put his head into the nursery at

three o'clock in the afternoon, and said—"The lecture."

I jumped up, and so did Henrietta. "It's not for girls," said Rupert; "women are not expected to do things when there's danger."

"*We* take care of *them*," said I, wondering if my mouth looked like Rupert's when I spoke, and whether my manner impressed Henrietta as much as his impressed me. She sat down again and only said, "I stayed in all Friday afternoon, and worked in bed on Saturday morning to finish your net."

"Come along," said Rupert. "You know I'm very much obliged to you for the net; it's a splendid one."

"I'll bring a camp-stool if there's not room on the bench," said Henrietta cheerfully.

"People never take camp-stools to lectures," said Rupert, and when we got to the cucumber frame we found that the old plank, which he had raised on inverted flower-pots, would have held a much larger audience than he had invited. Opposite to it was a rhubarb-pot, with the round top of a barrel resting on it. On this stood a glass of water. A delightful idea thrilled through me, suggested by an imperfect remembrance of a lecture on chemistry which I had attended.

"Will there be experiments?" I whispered.

"I think not," Henrietta replied. "There are glasses of water at the missionary meetings, and there are no experiments."

Meanwhile Rupert had been turning over the leaves of the yellow leather book. To say the truth, I think he was rather nervous; but if we have a virtue among us it is that of courage; and after dropping

frowning. I am inclined now to think that he could not answer my question off-hand; for though he looked cross then, after referring to the book he answered me: "It's a fire, or drowning, or an apoplectic fit, or anything of that sort." After which explanation, he hurried on. If what he said next came out of his own head, or whether he had learned it by heart, I never knew.



"How to act in an emergency."

the book twice, and drinking all the water at a draught, he found his place, and began.

"How to act in an emergency."

"What's an emergency?" I asked. I was very proud of being taught by Rupert, and anxious to understand everything as we went along.

"You shouldn't interrupt," said Rupert,

"There is no stronger sign of good-breeding than presence of mind in an——"

"—apoplectic fit," I suggested. I was giving the keenest attention, and Rupert had hesitated, the wind having blown over a leaf too many of the yellow leather book.

"An emergency," he shouted, when he had found his place. "Now we'll have

one each time. The one for to-day is—
How to act in a case of drowning."

To speak the strict truth, I would rather not have thought about drowning. I had my own private horror over a neighbouring milldam, and I had once been very much frightened by a spring-tide at the sea; but cowardice is not an indulgence for one of my race, so I screwed up my lips and pricked my ears to learn my duty in the unpleasant emergency of drowning.

"It doesn't mean being drowned yourself," Rupert continued, "but what to do when another person has been drowned."

The emergency was undoubtedly easier, and I gave a cheerful attention as Rupert began to question us.

"Supposing a man had been drowned in the canal, and was brought ashore, and you were the only people there, what would you do with him?"

I was completely nonplussed. I felt quite sure I could do nothing with him, he would be so heavy; but I felt equally certain that this was not the answer which Rupert expected, so I left the question to Henrietta's readier wit. She knitted her thick eyebrows for some minutes, partly with perplexity, and partly because of the sunshine reflected from the cucumber frame, and then said:

"We should bury him in a vault; Charlie and I *couldn't* dig a grave deep enough."

I admired Henrietta's foresight, but Rupert was furious.

"How *silly* you are!" he exclaimed, knocking over the top of the rhubarb-pot table and the empty glass in his wrath. "Of course I don't mean a dead man. I mean what would you do to bring a partly drowned man to life again?"

"That wasn't what you *said*," cried Henrietta, tossing her head.

"I let you come to my lecture," grumbled Rupert bitterly, as he stooped to set his

table right, "and this is the way you behave!"

"I'm very sorry, Rupert dear!" said Henrietta. "Indeed, I only mean to do my best, and I do like your lecture so very much!"

"So do I," I cried, "very, very much!" And by a simultaneous impulse Henrietta and I both clapped our hands vehemently. This restored Rupert's self-complacency, and he bowed and continued the lecture. From this we learned that the drowned man should be turned over on his face to let the canal water run out of his mouth and ears, and that his wet clothes should be got off, and he should be made dry and warm as quickly as possible, and placed in a comfortable position, with the head and shoulders slightly raised. All this seemed quite feasible to us. Henrietta had dressed and undressed lots of dolls, and I pictured myself filling a hot-water bottle at the kitchen boiler with an air of responsibility that should scare all lighter-minded folk. But the directions for "restoring breathing" troubled our sincere desire to learn; and this even though Henrietta practised for weeks afterwards upon me. I represented the drowned man, and she drew my arms above my head for "*inspiration*," and counted "one, two;" and doubled them and drove them back for "*expiration*;" but it tickled, and I laughed, and we could not feel at all sure that it would have made the drowned man breathe again.

Meanwhile Rupert went on with the course of lectures, and taught us how to behave in the event of a fire in the house, an epidemic in the neighbourhood, a bite from a mad dog, a chase by a mad bull, broken limbs, runaway horses, a chimney on fire, or a young lady burning to death. The lectures were not only delightful in themselves, but they furnished us with a whole set of new games, for Henrietta and I zealously practised every emergency as

far as the nature of things would allow. Covering our faces with wet cloths to keep off the smoke, we crept on our hands and knees to rescue a fancy cripple from an imaginary burning house, because of the current of air which Rupert told us was to be found near the floor. We fastened Baby Cecil's left leg to his right by pocket-handkerchiefs at the ankle, and above and below the knee, pretending that it was broken, and must be kept steady till we could convey him to the doctor. But for some unexplained reason Baby Cecil took offence at this game, and I do not think he could have howled and roared louder under the worst of real compound fractures. We had done it so skilfully, that we were greatly disgusted by his unaccommodating spirit, and his obstinate refusal to be put into the litter we had made out of Henrietta's stilts and a railway rug. We put the Scotch terrier in instead; but when one end of the litter gave way and he fell out, we were not sorry that the emergency was a fancy one, and that no broken limbs were really dependent upon our well-meant efforts.

There was one thing about Rupert's lectures which disappointed me. His emergencies were all things that happened in the daytime. Now I should not have liked the others to know that I was ever afraid of anything; but, really and truly, I was sometimes a little frightened—not of breaking my leg, or a house on fire, or an apoplectic fit, or anything of that sort, but—of things in the dark. Every half-holiday I hoped there would be something about what to do with robbers or ghosts, but there never was. I do not think there can have been any emergencies of that kind in the yellow leather book.

On the whole, I fancy Rupert found us satisfactory pupils, for he never did give up the lectures in a huff, though he some-

times threatened to do so, when I asked stupid questions, or Henrietta argued a point.

CHAPTER II.

HENRIETTA—A FAMILY CHRONICLE—THE SCHOOL MIMIC—MY FIRST FIGHT.

HENRIETTA often argued points, which made Rupert very angry. He said that even if she were in the right, that had nothing to do with it, for girls oughtn't to dispute or discuss. And then Henrietta argued that point too.

Rupert and Henrietta often squabbled, and always about the same sort of thing. I am sure he would have been *very* kind to her if she would have agreed with him, and done what he wanted. He often told me that the gentlemen of our family had always been courteous to women, and I think he would have done anything for Henrietta if it had not been that she would do everything for herself.

When we wanted to vex her very much, we used to call her "Monkey," because we knew she liked to be like a boy. She persuaded Mother to let her have her boots made like ours, because she said the roads were so rough and muddy (which they are). And we found two of her books with her name written in, and she had put "Henry," and Rupert wrote Etta after it, and "Monkey" after that. So she tore the leaves out. Her hair was always coming out of curl. It was very dark, and when it fell into her eyes she used to give her head a peculiar shake and toss, so that half of it fell the wrong way, and there was a parting at the side, like our partings. Nothing made Rupert angrier than this.

Henrietta was very good at inventing things. Once she invented a charade quite like a story. Rupert was very much pleased with it, because he was to act the hero, who was to be a young cavalier of a very old family—our family. He was to arrive at an inn; Henrietta made it the real old inn in the middle of the town, and I was the innkeeper, with Henrietta's pillow to make me fat, and one of Nurse's clean aprons. Then he was to ask to spend a night in the old Castle, and Henrietta made that the real Castle, which was about nine miles off, and which belonged to our cousin, though he never spoke to us. And a ghost was to appear. The ghost of the ancestor in the miniature in Mother's bedroom. Henrietta did the ghost in a white sheet; and with her hair combed, and a burnt-cork moustache, she looked so exactly like the picture that Rupert started when she came in, and stared; and Mother said he had acted splendidly.

Henrietta was wonderfully like the picture. Much more like than Rupert ever was, which rather vexed him, because that ancestor was one of the very bravest, and his name was Rupert. He was rather vexed, too, when she rode the pony bare-backed which had kicked him off. But I think the pony was fonder of Henrietta, which perhaps made it easier for her to manage it. She used to feed it with bits of bread. It got them out of her pocket.

One of the things Henrietta could not do as well as Rupert was cricket. Rupert was one of the best players in the school. Henrietta used to want to play with us at home, and she and I did play for a bit, before breakfast, in the drying ground; but Rupert said, if I encouraged her in being unladylike, he would not let me come to the school matches. He said I might take my choice, and play either

with girls or boys, but not with both. But I thought it would be very mean to leave Henrietta in the lurch. So I told her I would stick by her, as Rupert had not actually forbidden me. He had given me my choice, and he always kept his word. But she would not let me. She pretended that she did not mind; but I know she did, for I could see afterwards that she had been crying. However, she would not play, and Mother said she had much rather she did not, as she was so afraid of her getting hit by the ball. So that settled it, and I was very glad not to have to give up going to the school matches.

The school we went to was the old town grammar school. It was a very famous one; but it was not so expensive as big public schools are, and I believe this was why we lived in this town after my father's death, for Mother was not at all rich.

The grammar school was very large, and there were all sorts of boys there—some of gentlemen, and tradesmen, and farmers. Some of the boys were so very dirty, and had such horrid habits out of school, that when Rupert was thirteen, and I was ten, he called a council at the beginning of the half, and a lot of the boys formed a committee, and drew up the code of honour, and we all subscribed to it.

The code of honour was to forbid a lot of things that had been very common in the school. Lying, cheating over bargains, telling tales, bragging, bad language, and what the code called "conduct unbecoming schoolfellows and gentlemen." There were a lot of rules in it, too, about clean nails, and shirts, and collars and socks, and things of that sort. If any boy refused to agree to it, he had to fight with Thomas Johnson.

There could not have been a better person than Rupert to make a code of honour. We have always been taught that honour was the watch-word of our family

—dearer than anything that could be gained or lost, very much dearer than mere life. The motto of our arms came from an ancestor who lost the favour of the King by refusing to do something against his conscience for which he would have been rewarded. It is "Honour before honours."

I can just remember the man, with iron-grey hair and gold spectacles, who came to our house after my father's death. I think he was a lawyer. He took lots of snuff, so that Henrietta sneezed when he kissed her, which made her very angry. He put Rupert and me in front of him, to see which of us was most like my father, and I can recall the big pinch of snuff he took, and the sound of his voice saying, "Be like your father, boys! He was as good as he was gallant. And there never lived a more honourable gentleman."

Every one said the same. We were very proud of it, and always boasted about our father to the new nursemaids, or any other suitable hearer. I was a good deal annoyed by one little maid, who when I told her, over our nursery tea, that my father had been the most honourable of men, began to cry about her father, who was dead too, and said he was "just the same; for in the one and twenty years he kept a public-house, he never put so much as a pinch of salt into the beer, nor even a gill of water, unless it was in the evening at fair-time, when the only way to keep the men from fighting was to give them their liquor so that it could not do them much harm." I was very much offended by the comparison of *my* father, who was an officer and a gentleman of rank, with *her* father, who was a village publican; but I should like to say, that I think now that I was wrong and Jane was right. If her father gave up profit for principle, he *was* like my father, and like the ancestor we

get the motto from, and like every other honourable man, of any rank or any trade.

Every time I boasted in the nursery of my father being so honourable, I always finished my saying, that that was why he had the word Honourable before his name, as men in old times used to be called "the Good" or "the Lion Heart." The nursemaids quite believed it, and I believed it myself, till the first week I went to school.

It makes me hot all over to remember what I suffered that week, and for long afterwards. But I think it cured me of bragging, which is a mean ungentlemanly habit, and of telling everybody everything about myself and my relations, which is very weak-minded.

The second day I was there, one of the boys came up to me and said, with a mock ceremony and politeness which unfortunately took me in, "If I am not mistaken, sir, that esteemed lady, your mother, is an Honourable?"

He was nearly five years older than I, his name was Weston; he had a thin cadaverous face, a very large nose, and a very melancholy expression. I found out afterwards that he was commonly called "the clown," and was considered by boys who had been to the London theatres to surpass the best professional comic actors when he chose to put forth his powers. I did not know this then. I thought him a little formal, but particularly courteous in his manner, and not wishing to be behindhand in politeness, I replied, with as much of his style as I could assume, "Certainly, sir. But that is because my father was an Honourable. My father, sir, was the most honourable of men."

A slight spasm appeared to pass over Weston's face, and then he continued the conversation in a sadder tone than the subject seemed to require, but I supposed

that this was due to his recalling that my father was dead.

I confess that it did not need many leading inquiries to draw from me such a narrative of my father's valour and high principle, as well as the noble sentiments and conspicuous bravery which have marked our family from Saxon times, as I was well accustomed to pour forth for the edification of our nursemaids. I had not proceeded far, when my new friend said, "Won't you walk in and take a seat?" It was recreation time, and the other boys were all out in the playground. I had no special friend as yet; Rupert had stuck to me all the first day, and had now left me to find my own level. I had lingered near the door as we came out, and there Weston had joined me. He now led me back into the deserted schoolroom, and we sat down together on an old black oak locker, at the bottom of the room.

How well I remember the scene! The dirty floor, the empty benches, the torn books sprinkled upon the battered desks, the dusty sunshine streaming in, the white-faced clock on the wall opposite, over which the hands moved with almost incredible rapidity. But when does time ever fly so fast as with people who are talking about themselves or their relations?

Once the mathematical master passed through the room. He glanced at us curiously, but Weston's face was inscrutable, and I—tracing some surprise that I should have secured so old and so fine-mannered a boy for a friend—held up my head, and went on with my narrative, as fluently as I could, to show that I had parts which justified Weston in his preference.

Tick, tack! went the clock. Click, clack! went my tongue. I fear that quite half an hour must have passed, when a big boy, with an open face, blue eyes, and closely curling fair hair, burst in. On sec-

ing us he exclaimed, "Hulloh!" and then stopped, I suspect in obedience to Weston's eyes, which met his in a brief but expressive gaze. Then Weston turned to me.

"Allow me," said he, "to introduce Mr. Thomas Johnson. He bears a very high character in this school, and it will afford him the keenest satisfaction to hear an authentic account of such a man as your esteemed father, whose character should be held up for the imitation of young gentlemen in every establishment for the education of youth."

I blushed with pride and somewhat with nervousness as Mr. Thomas Johnson seated himself on the locker on the other side of me and begged (with less elegance of expression than my first friend) that I would "go ahead."

I did so. But a very few minutes exhausted the patience of my new hearer. When he had kicked a loose splinter of wood satisfactorily off the leg of one of the desks he began to look at the clock, which quickened my pace from my remoter ancestors to what the colonel of the regiment in which my father was an ensign had said of him. I completed my narrative at last with the lawyer's remark, and added, "and everybody says the same. And *that* is why my father had '*The Honourable*' before his name, just as——" &c., &c.

I had no sooner uttered these words than Johnson started from his seat, and, covering his face with a spotted silk pocket-handkerchief, rushed precipitately from the schoolroom. For one brief instant I fancied I heard him choking with laughter, but when I turned to Weston he got up too, with a look of deep concern. "Mr. Johnson is taken very unwell, I fear," said he. "It is a peculiar kind of spasm to which he is subject. Excuse me!"

He hurried anxiously after his friend, and I was left alone in the schoolroom,

into which the other boys shortly began to pour.

"Have you been all alone, old fellow?" said Rupert kindly; "I hoped you had picked up a chum."

"So I have," was my proud reply; "two chums."

"I hope they're decent fellows," said Rupert. (He had a most pestilent trick of perpetually playing monitor, to the wet-blanketing of all good fellowship.)

"You know best," said I pertly; "it's Weston and Johnson. We've been together a long time."

"Weston?" cried Rupert. "I hope to goodness, Charlie, you've not been playing the fool?"

"You can ask them," said I, and tossing my head I went to my proper place.

For the rest of school-time I wore a lofty and Rupert an anxious demeanour. Secure on the level of a higher friendship, I was mean enough to snub the friendly advances of one or two of the younger boys.

When we went home at night, I found my mother much more ready than Rupert to believe that my merits had gained for me the regard of two of the upper boys. I was exultingly happy. Not a quail disturbed the waking dreams in which (after I was in bed) I retold my family tale at even greater length than before, except that I remembered one or two incidents, which in the excitement of the hour I had forgotten when in school.

I was rather sorry, too, that, bound by the strictest of injunctions from Rupert and my own promise, I had not been able, ever so casually, to make my new friends aware that among my other advantages was that of being first cousin to a peer, the very one who lived at the Castle. The Castle was a show place, and I knew that many of my schoolfellows were glad

enough to take their friends and go themselves to be shown by the housekeeper the pictures of *my* ancestors. On this point they certainly had an advantage over me. I had not seen the pictures. Our cousin never called on us, and never asked us to the Castle, and of course we could not go to our father's old home like common holiday-making townspeople.

I would rather not say very much about the next day. It must seem almost incredible that I could have failed to see that Weston and Johnson were making fun of me; and I confess that it was not for want of warnings that I had made a fool of myself.

I had looked forward to going to school with about equal measures of delight and dread; my pride and ambition longed for this first step in life, but Rupert had filled me with a wholesome awe of its stringent etiquette, its withering ridicule, and unsparing severities. However, in his anxiety to make me modest and circumspect, I think he rather overpainted the picture, and when I got through the first day without being bullied, and made such creditable friends on the second, I began to think that Rupert's experience of school life must be due to some lack of those social and conversational powers with which I seemed to be better endowed. And then Weston's acting would have deceived a wiser head than mine. And the nursemaids had always listened so willingly!

As it happened, Rupert was unwell next day and could not go to school. He was obviously afraid of my going alone, but I had no fears. My self-satisfaction was not undone till playtime. Then not a boy dispersed to games. They all gathered round Weston in the playground, and with a confident air I also made my way to his side. As he turned his face to me I was undeceived.

Weston was accustomed—at such times

as suited his caprice and his resources—to give exhibitions of his genius for mimicry to the rest of the boys. I had heard from Rupert of these entertainments, which were much admired by the school. They commonly consisted of funny dialogues between various worthies of the place well known to everybody, which made Weston's audience able to judge of the accuracy of his imitations. From the head-master to the idiot who blew the organ bellows in church, every inhabitant of the place who was gifted with any recognisable peculiarity was personated at one time or another by the wit of our school. The favourite imitation of all was supposed to be one of the Dialogues of Plato, "omitted by some strange oversight in the edition which graces the library of our learned and respected doctor," Weston would say with profound gravity. The Dialogue was between Dr. Jessop and Silly Billy—the idiot already referred to—and the apposite Latin quotations of the head-master and his pompous English, with the inapposite replies of the organ-blower, given in the local dialect and Billy's own peculiar jabber, were supposed to form a masterpiece of mimicry.

Little did I think that my family chronicle was to supply Weston with a new field for his talents!

In the midst of my shame, I could hardly help admiring the clever way in which he had remembered all the details, and twisted them into a comic ballad, which he had composed overnight, and which he now recited with a mock heroic air and voice, which made every point tell, and kept the boys in convulsions of laughter. Not a smile crossed his long, lantern-jawed face; but Mr. Thomas Johnson made no effort this time to hide a severe fit of his peculiar spasms in his spotted handkerchief.

Sometimes—at night—in the very bottom

of my own heart, when the darkness seemed thick with horrors, and when I could not make up my mind whether to keep my ears strained to catch the first sound of anything dreadful, or to pull the blankets over my head and run the risk of missing it,—in such moments, I say, I have had a passing private doubt whether I had inherited my share of the family instinct of courage at a crisis.

It was therefore a relief to me to feel that in this moment of despair, when I was only waiting till the boys, being no longer amused by Weston, should turn to amuse themselves with me, my first and strongest feeling was a sense of relief that Rupert was not at school, and that I could bear the fruits of my own folly on my own shoulders. To be spared his hectoring and lecturing, his hurt pride, his reproaches, and rage with me, and a probable fight with Weston, in which he must have been seriously hurt and I should have been blamed—this was some comfort.

I had got my lesson well by heart. Fifty thousand preachers in fifty thousand pulpits could never have taught me so effectually as Weston's ballad, and the laughter of his audience, that there is less difference than one would like to believe between the vanity of bragging of one's self and the vanity of bragging of one's relations. Also that it is not dignified or discreet to take new acquaintance into your entire confidence; and that even if one is blessed with friends of such quick sympathy that they really enjoy hearing about people they have never seen, it is well not to abuse the privilege, and now and then to allow them an "innings" at describing *their* remarkable parents, brothers, sisters, and remoter relatives.

I realised all this fully as I stood, with burning cheeks and downcast eyes, at the very elbow of my tormentor. But I am glad to know that I would not have run

away even if I could. My resolution grew stouter with every peal of laughter to bear whatever might come with pluck and good temper. I had been a fool, but I would show that I was not a coward.

I was very glad that Rupert's influenza kept him at home for a few days. I told him briefly that I had been bullied, but that it was my own fault, and I would rather say no more about it. I begged him to promise that he would not take up my quarrel in any way, but leave me to fight it out for myself, which he did. When he came back I think he regretted his promise. Happily he never heard all the ballad, but the odd verses which the boys sang about the place put him into a fury. It was a long time before he forgave me, and I doubt if he ever quite forgave Weston.

I held out as well as I could. I made no complaint, and kept my temper. I must say that Henrietta behaved uncommonly well to me at this time.

"After all, you know, Charlie," she said, "you've not done anything *really wrong or dishonourable*." This was true, and it comforted me.

Except Henrietta, I really had not a friend; for Rupert was angry with me, and the holding up at school only made me feel worse at home.

At last the joke began to die out, and I was getting on very well, but for one boy, a heavy-looking fellow with a pasty face, who was always creeping after me, and asking me to tell him about my father. "Johnson Minor," we called him. He was a younger brother of Thomas Johnson, the champion of the code of honour.

He was older than I, but he was below me in class, and though he was bigger, he was not a very great deal bigger; and if there is any truth in the stories I have so often told, our family has been used to

fight against odds for many generations.

I thought about this a good deal, and measured Johnson Minor with my eye. At last I got Henrietta to wrestle and box with me for practice.

She was always willing to do anything Tomboyish, indeed she was generally willing to do anything one wanted, and her biceps were as hard as mine, for I pinched them to see. We got two pairs of gloves, much too big for us, and stuffed cotton wool in to make them like boxing-gloves, as we used to stuff out the buff-coloured waistcoat when we acted old gentlemen in it. But it did not do much good; for I did not like to hurt Henrietta when I got a chance, and I do not think she liked to hurt me. So I took to dumb-belling every morning in my night-shirt; and at last I determined I would have it out with Johnson Minor, once for all.

One afternoon, when the boys had been very friendly with me, and were going to have me in the paper chase on Saturday, he came up in the old way and began asking me about my father, quite gravely, like a sort of poor imitation of Weston. So I turned round and said, "Whatever my father was—he's dead. Your father's alive, Johnson, and if you weren't a coward, you wouldn't go on bullying a fellow who hasn't got one."

"I'm a coward, am I, Master Honourable?" said Johnson, turning scarlet, and at the word *Honourable* I thought he had broken my nose. I never felt such pain in my life, but it was the only pain I felt on the occasion; afterwards I was much too much excited. I am sorry that I cannot remember very clearly about it, which I should have liked to do, as it was my first fight.

There was no time to fight properly. I was obliged to do the best I could. I made a sort of rough plan in my head, that

I would cling to Johnson as long as I was able, and hit him whenever I got a chance. I did not quite know when he was hitting me from when I was hitting him; but I know that I held on, and that the ground seemed to be always hitting us both.

How long we had been struggling and cuffing and hitting (less scientifically but more effectually than when Henrietta and I flourished our stuffed driving gloves, with strict and constant reference to the woodcuts in a sixpenny Boxer's Guide) before I got slightly stunned, I do not know; when I came round I was lying in Weston's arms, and Johnson Minor was weeping bitterly (as he believed) over my corpse. I fear Weston had not allayed his remorse.

My great anxiety was to shake hands with Johnson. I never felt more friendly towards any one.

He met me in the handsomest way. He apologised for speaking of my father—"since you don't like it," he added, with an appearance of sincerity which puzzled me at the time, and which I did not understand till afterwards—and I apologised for calling him a coward. We were always good friends, and our fight made an end of the particular chaff which had caused it.

It reconciled Rupert to me too, which was my greatest gain.

Rupert is quite right. There is nothing like being prepared for emergencies. I suppose, as I was stunned, that Johnson got the best of it; but judging from his appearance as we washed ourselves at the school pump, I was now quite prepared for the emergency of having to defend myself against any boy not twice my own size.

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL CRICKET—LEMON-KALI—THE BOYS' BRIDGE—AN UNEXPECTED EMERGENCY.

RUPERT and I were now the best of good friends again. I cared more for his favour than for the goodwill of any one else, and kept as much with him as I could.

I played cricket with him in the school matches. At least I did not bat or bowl, but I and some of the junior fellows "fielded out," and when Rupert was waiting for the ball, I would have given my life to catch quickly and throw deftly. I used to think no one ever looked so handsome as he did in his orange-coloured shirt, white flannel trousers, and the cap which Henrietta made him. He and I had spent all our savings on that new shirt, for mother would not get him a new one. She did not like cricket, or anything at which people could hurt themselves. But Johnson Major had got a new sky-blue shirt and cap, and we did not like Rupert to be outdone by him, for Johnson's father is only a canal-carrier.

But the shirt emptied our pockets, and made the old cap look worse than ever. Then Henrietta, without saying a word to us, bought some orange flannel, and picked the old cap to pieces, and cut out a new one by it, and made it all herself, with a button, and a stiff peak and everything, and it really did perfectly, and looked very well in the sunshine over Rupert's brown face and glossy black hair.

There always was sunshine when we played cricket. The hotter it was the better we liked it. We had a bottle of lemon-kali powder on the ground, and I used to have to make a fizzing-cup in a tin

mug for the other boys. I got the water from the canal.

Lemon-kali is delicious on a very hot day—so refreshing! But I sometimes fancied I felt a little sick *afterwards*, if I had had a great deal. And Bustard (who was always called Bustard-Plaster, because he was the doctor's son) said it was the dragons out of the canal water lashing their tails inside us. He had seen them under his father's microscope.

The field where we played was on the banks of the canal, the opposite side to the town. I believe it was school property. At any rate we had the right of playing there.

We had to go nearly a quarter of a mile out of the way before there was a bridge, and it was very vexatious to toil a quarter of a mile down on one side and a quarter of a mile up on the other to get at a meadow which lay directly opposite to the school. Weston wrote a letter about it to the weekly paper asking the town to build us a bridge. He wrote splendid letters, and this was one of his very best. He said that if the town council laughed at the notion of building a bridge for boys, they must remember that the Boys of to-day were the Men of to-morrow (which we all thought a grand sentence, though MacDonald, a very accurate-minded fellow, said it would really be some years before most of us were grown up). Then Weston called us the Rising Generation, and showed that, in all probability, the Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor, and Primate of the years to come now played "all unconscious of their future fame" in the classic fields that lay beyond the water, and promised that in the hours of our coming greatness we would look back with gratitude to the munificence of our native city. He put lots of Latin in, and ended with some Latin verses of his own, in which he made the Goddess of the Stream plead

for us as her sons. By the stream he meant the canal, for we had no river, which of course Weston couldn't help.

How we watched for the next week's paper! But it wasn't in. They never did put his things in, which mortified him sadly. His greatest ambition was to get something of his own invention printed. Johnson said he believed it was because Weston always put something personal in the things he wrote. He was very sarcastic, and couldn't help making fun of people.

It was all the kinder of Weston to do his best about the bridge, because he was not much of a cricketer himself. He said he was too short-sighted, and that it suited him better to poke in the hedges for beetles. He had a splendid collection of insects. Bustard used to say that he poked with his nose, as if he were an insect himself, and it was a proboscis; but he said too that his father said it was a pleasure to see Weston make a section of anything, and prepare objects for the microscope. His fingers were as clever as his tongue.

It was not long after Rupert got his new shirt and cap that a very sad thing happened.

We were playing cricket one day as usual. It was very hot, and I was mixing some lemon-kali at the canal, and holding up the mug to tempt Weston over, who was on the other side with his proboscis among the water-plants collecting larvæ. Rupert was batting, and a new fellow, who bowled much more swiftly than we were accustomed to, had the ball. I was straining my ears to catch what Weston was shouting to me between his hands, when I saw him start and point to the cricketers, and turning round I saw Rupert lying on the ground.

The ball had hit him on the knee and knocked him down. He struggled up,

and tried to stand; but whilst he was saying it was nothing, and scolding the other fellows for not going on, he fell down again fainting from pain.

"The leg's broken, depend upon it," said Bustard-Plaster; "shall I run for my father?"

I thanked him earnestly, for I did not like to leave Rupert myself. But Johnson Major, who was kicking off his cricketing shoes, said, "It'll take an hour to get round. I'll go. Get him some water, and keep his cap on. The sun is blazing." And before we could speak he was in the canal and swimming across.

I went back to the bank for my mug, in which the lemon-kali was fizzing itself out, and with this I got some water for Rupert, and at last he opened his eyes. As I was getting the water I saw Weston unmooring a boat which was fastened a little farther up. He was evidently coming to help us to get Rupert across the canal.

Bustard's words rang in my ears. Perhaps Rupert's leg was broken. Bustard was a doctor's son, and ought to know. And I have often thought it must be a very difficult thing to know, for people's legs don't break right off when they break. My first feeling had been utter bewilderment and misery, but I collected my senses with the reflection that if I lost my presence of mind in the first real emergency that happened to me, my attendance at Rupert's lectures had been a mockery, and I must be the first fool and coward of my family. And if I failed in the emergency of a broken leg, how could I ever hope to conduct myself with credit over a case of drowning? I did feel thankful that Rupert's welfare did not depend on our pulling his arms up and down in a particular way; but as Weston was just coming ashore, I took out my pocket-handkerchief, and kneeling down by Rupert said, with as good an air as I

could assume, "We must tie the broken leg to the other at the——"

"*Don't touch it, you young fool!*" shrieked Rupert. And though directly afterwards he begged my pardon for speaking sharply, he would not hear of my touching his leg. So they got him into the boat the best way they could, and Weston sat by him to hold him up, and the boy who had been bowling pulled them across. I wasn't big enough to do either, so I had to run round by the bridge.

I fancy it must be easier to act with presence of mind if the emergency has happened to somebody who has not been used to order you about as much as Rupert was used to order me.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBTFUL BLESSING—A FAMILY FAILING—OLD BATTLES—THE CANAL-CARRIER'S HOME.

WHEN we found that Rupert's leg was not broken, and that it was only a severe blow on his knee, we were all delighted. But when weeks and months went by and he was still lame and very pale and always tired, we began to count for how long past, if the leg had been broken, it would have been set, and poor Rupert quite well. And when Johnny Bustard said that legs and arms were often stronger after being broken than before (if they were properly set, as his father could do them), we felt that if Gregory would bowl for people's shins he had better break them at once, and let Mr. Bustard make a good job of them.

The first part of the time Rupert made

light of his accident, and wanted to go back to school, and was very irritable and impatient. But as the year went on he left off talking about its being all nonsense, and though he suffered a great deal he never complained. I used quite to miss his lecturing me, but he did not even squabble with Henrietta now.

This reminds me of a great fault of mine—I am afraid it was a family failing, though it is a very mean one—I was jealous. If I was “particular friends” with any one, I liked to have him all to myself; when Rupert was “out” with me because of the Weston affair, I was “particular friends” with Henrietta. I did not exactly give her up when Rupert and I were all right again, but when she complained one day (I think *she* was jealous too!) I said, “I’m particular friends with you *as a sister* still; but you know Rupert and I are both boys.”

I did love Rupert very dearly, and I would have given up anything and everything to serve him and wait upon him now that he was laid up; but I would rather have had him all to myself, whereas Henrietta was now his particular friend. It is because I know how meanly I felt about it that I should like to say how good she was. My Mother was very delicate, and she had a horror of accidents; but Henrietta stood at Mr. Bustard’s elbow all the time he was examining Rupert’s knee, and after that she always did the fomentations and things. At first Rupert said she hurt him, and would have Nurse to do it; but Nurse hurt him so much more, that then he would not let anybody but Henrietta touch it. And he never called her Monkey now, and I could see how she tried to please him. One day she came down to breakfast with her hair all done up in the way that was in fashion then, like a grown-up young lady, and I think Rupert was pleased, though she

looked rather funny and very red. And so Henrietta nursed him altogether, and used to read battles to him as he lay on the sofa, and Rupert made plans of the battles on cardboard, and moved bits of pith out of the elder-tree about for the troops, and showed Henrietta how if he had had the moving of them really, and had done it quite differently to the way the generals did, the other side would have won instead of being beaten.

And Mother used to say, “That’s just the way your poor father used to go on! As if it wasn’t enough to have to run the risk of being killed or wounded once or twice yourself, without bothering your head about battles you’ve nothing to do with.”

And when he did the battle in which my father fell, and planted the battery against which he led his men for the last time, and where he was struck under the arm, with which he was waving his sword over his head, Rupert turned whiter than ever, and said, “Good Heavens, Henrietta! Father *limped* up to that battery! He led his men for two hours, after he was wounded in the leg, before he fell—and here I sit and grumble at a knock from a cricket-ball!”

Just then Mr. Bustard came in, and when he shook Rupert’s hand he kept his fingers on it, and shook his own head; and he said there was “an abnormal condition of the pulse,” in such awful tones, that I was afraid it was something that Rupert would die of. But Henrietta understood better, and she would not let Rupert do that battle any more.

Rupert’s friends were very kind to him when he was ill, but the kindest of all was Thomas Johnson.

Johnson’s grandfather was a canal-carrier, and made a good deal of money, and Johnson’s father got the money and went on with the business. We had a great discussion once in the nursery as to

whether Johnson's father was a gentleman, and Rupert ran downstairs, and into the drawing-room, shouting, "Now, Mother! is a carrier a gentleman?"

And Mother, who was lying on the sofa, said, "Of course not. What silly things you children do ask! Why can't you amuse yourselves in the nursery? It is very hard you should come and disturb me for such a nonsensical question."

Rupert was always good to Mother, and he shut the drawing-room door very gently. Then he came rushing up to the nursery to say that Mother said, "Of course not." But Henrietta said, "What did you ask her?" And when Rupert told her she said, "Of course Mother thought you meant one of those men who have carts to carry things, with a hood on the top and a dog underneath."

Johnson's father and grandfather were not carriers of that kind. They owned a lot of canal-boats, and one or two big barges, which took all kinds of things all the way to London.

Mr. Johnson used to say, "In my father's time men of business lived near their work both in London and the country. That's why my house is close to the wharf. I am not ashamed of my trade, and the place is very comfortable, so I shall stick to it. Tom may move into the town and give the old house to the foreman when I am gone, if he likes to play the fine gentleman."

Tom would be very foolish if he did. It is the dearest old house one could wish for. It was built of red brick, but the ivy has covered it so thickly that it is clipped round the old-fashioned windows like a hedge. The gardens are simply perfect. In summer you can pick as many flowers and eat as much fruit as you like, and if that is not the use and beauty of a garden, I do not know what is.

Johnson's father was very proud of him,

and let him have anything he liked, and in the midsummer holidays Johnson used to bring his father's trap and take Rupert out for drives, and Mrs. Johnson used to put meat pies and strawberries in a basket under the seat, so that it was a kind of picnic, for the old horse had belonged to Mr. Bustard, and was a capital one for standing still.

It was partly because of the Johnsons being so kind to Rupert that Johnson Minor and I became chums at school, and partly because the fight had made us friendly, and I had no Rupert now, and was rather jealous of his taking completely to Henrietta, and most of all, I fancy, because Johnson Minor was determined to be friends with me. He was a very odd fellow. There was nothing he liked so much as wonderful stories about people, and I never heard such wonderful stories as he told himself. When we became friends he told me that he had never meant to bully me when he asked about my father; he really did want to hear about his battles and so forth.

But the utmost I could tell him about my father was nothing to the tales he told me about his grandfather, the navy captain.

CHAPTER V.

THE NAVY CAPTAIN—SEVEN PARROTS IN
A FUCHSIA TREE—THE HARBOUR LION
AND THE SILVER CHAIN—THE LEGLESS
GIANTS — DOWN BELOW — JOHNSON'S
WHARF.

THE Johnsons were very fond of their father, he was such a good, kind man; but I think they would have been glad if he had had a profession instead of being a

canal-carrier, and I am sure it pleased them to think that Mrs. Johnson's father had been a navy captain, and that his portrait—uniform and all—hung over the horsehair sofa in the dining-room, near the window where the yellow roses used to come in.

If I could get the room to myself, I used to kneel on the sofa, on one of the bolsters, and gaze at the faded little picture till I lost my balance on the slippery horsehair from the intensity of my interest in the hero of Johnson Minor's tales. Every time, I think, I expected to see some change in the expression of the captain's red face, adapting it better to what, by his grandson's account, his character must have been. It seemed so odd he should look so wooden after having seen so much.

The captain had been a native of South Devon.

"Raleigh, Drake, my grandfather, and lots of other great sailors were born in Devonshire," Johnson said. He certainly did brag; but he spoke so slowly and quietly, that it did not sound as like bragging as it would have done if he had talked faster, I think.

The captain had lived at Dartmouth, and of this place Johnson gave me such descriptions, that to this day the name of Dartmouth has a romantic sound in my ears, though I know now that all the marvels were Johnson's own invention, and barely founded upon the real quaintness of the place, of which he must have heard from his mother. It became the highest object of my ambition to see the captain's native city. That there must be people—shopkeepers, for instance, and a man to keep the post office—who lived there all along, was a fact that I could not realise sufficiently to envy them.

Johnson—or Fred, as I used to call him by this time—only exaggerated the

truth about the shrubs that grow in the greenhouse atmosphere of South Devon, when he talked of the captain's fuchsia trees being as big as the old willows by the canal wharf; but the parrots must have been a complete invention. He said the captain had seven. Two green, two crimson, two blue, and one violet with an orange-coloured beak and grey lining to his wings; and that they built nests in the fuchsia trees of sandal-wood shavings, and lined them with the captain's silk pocket-handkerchiefs. He said that though the parrots stole the captain's handkerchiefs, they were all very much attached to him; but they quarrelled among themselves, and swore at each other in seven dialects of the West Coast of Africa.

Mrs. Johnson herself once showed me a little print of the harbour, and told me that it was supposed that in old times an iron chain was stretched from rock to rock across its mouth as a means of defence. And that afternoon Fred told me a splendid story about the chain, and how it was made of silver, and that each link was worth twenty pounds, and how at the end where it was fastened with a padlock every night at sunset, to keep out the French, a lion sat on a ledge of rock at the harbour's mouth, with the key tied round his neck by a sea-green ribbon. He had to have a new ribbon on the first Sunday in every month, Fred said, because his mane dirtied them so fast. A story which Fred had of his grandfather's single-handed encounter with this lion on one occasion, when the gallant captain would let a brig in distress into the harbour after sunset, and the lion would not let him have the key, raised my opinion of his courage and his humanity to the highest point. But what he did at home was nothing to the exploits which Fred recounted of him in foreign lands.

I fancy Fred must have read some real

accounts of South America, the tropical forests, the wonderful birds and flowers, and the ruins of those buried cities which have no history; and that on these real marvels he built up his own romances of the Great Stone City, where the captain encountered an awful race of giants with no legs, who carved stones into ornaments with clasp-knives, as the Swiss cut out pretty things in wood, and cracked the cocoa-nuts with their fingers. I am sure he invented flowers as he went along when he was telling me about the forests. He used to look round the garden (which would have satisfied any one who had not seen or heard of what the captain had come across) and say in his slow way, "The blue chalice flower was about the shape of that magnolia, only twice as big, and just the colour of the gentians in the border, and it had a great white tassel hanging out like the cactus in the parlour window, and all the leaves were yellow underneath; and it smelt like rosemary."

If the captain's experiences in other countries outshone what had befallen him in his native land, both these paled before the wonders he had seen, and the emergencies he had been placed in at sea. Fred told me that his grandfather had a diving-bell of his own on board his own ship, and the things he saw when he went down in it must have made his remembrances of the South American forests appear tame by comparison.

Once, in the middle of the Pacific, the captain dropped down in his bell into the midst of a society of sea people who had no hair, but the backs of their heads were shaped like sou'-wester hats. The front rim formed one eyebrow for both eyes, and they could move the peak behind as beavers move their tails, and it helped them to go up and down in the water. They were not exactly mermaids, Fred said, they had no particular tail, it all

ended in a kind of fringe of sea-weed, which swept after them when they moved, like the train of a lady's dress. The captain was so delighted with them that he stayed below much longer than usual; but in an unlucky moment some of the sea people let the water into the diving-bell, and the captain was nearly drowned. He did become senseless, but when his body floated, it was picked up and restored to life by the first mate, who had been cruising, with tears in his eyes, over the spot in the ship's boat for seven days without taking anything to eat.—"*He* was a Dartmouth man, too," said Fred Johnson.

"He evidently knew what to do in the emergency of drowning," thought I.

I feel as if any one who hears of Fred's stories must think he was a liar. But he really was not. Mr. Johnson was very strict with the boys in some ways, though he was so good-natured, and Fred had been taught to think a lie to get himself out of a scrape or anything of that sort quite as wrong as we should have thought it. But he liked *telling* things. I believe he made them up and amused himself with them in his own head if he had no one to listen. He used to say, "Come and sit in the kitchen garden this afternoon, and I'll *tell* you." And whether he meant me to think them true or not, I certainly did believe in his stories.

One thing always struck me as very odd about Fred Johnson. He was very fond of fruit, and when we sat on the wall and ate the white currants with pounded sugar in a mug between us, I believe he always ate more than I did, though he was "telling" all the time, and I had nothing to do but to listen and eat.

He certainly talked very slowly, in a dreary, monotonous sort of voice, which suited his dull, pasty face better than it suited the subject of his exciting narratives. But I think it seemed to make one all the

more impatient to hear what was coming. A very favourite place of ours for "telling" was the wharf (Johnson's wharf, as it was called), where the canal boats came and went, and loaded and unloaded. We made a "coastguard station" among some old timber in the corner, and here we used to sit and watch for the boats.

When a real barge came we generally went over it, for the men knew Fred, and were very good-natured. The barges seemed more like ships than the canal boats did. They had masts, and could sail when they got into the river. Sometimes we went down into the cabin, and peeped into the little berths with sliding shutter fronts, and the lockers, which were like a fixed seat running round two sides of the cabin, with lids opening and showing places to put away things in. I was not famous in the nursery for keeping my things very tidy, but I fancied I could stow my clothes away to perfection in a locker, and almost cook my own dinner with the bargeman's little stove.

And every time a barge was loaded up, and the bargemaster took his post at the rudder, whilst the old horse strained himself to start—and when the heavy boat swung slowly down the canal and passed out of sight, I felt more and more sorry to be left behind upon the wharf.

CHAPTER VI.

S. PHILIP AND S. JAMES—THE MONKEY-BARGE AND THE DOG—WAR, PLAGUE, AND FIRE—THE DULNESS OF EVERY-DAY LIFE.

THERE were two churches in our town. Not that the town was so very large or the churches so very small as to make this needful. On the contrary, the town was

of modest size, with no traces of having ever been much bigger, and the churches were very large and very handsome. That is, they were fine outside, and might have been very imposing within but for the painted galleries which blocked up the arches above and the tall pews which dwarfed the majestic rows of pillars below. They were not more than a quarter of a mile apart. One was dedicated to S. Philip and the other to S. James, and they were commonly called "the brother churches." In the tower of each hung a peal of eight bells.

One clergyman served both the brother churches, and the services were at S. Philip one week and at S. James the next. We were so accustomed to this that it never struck us as odd. What did seem odd, and perhaps a little dull, was that people in other places should have to go to the same church week after week.

There was only one day in the year on which both the peals of bells were heard, the Feast of SS. Philip and James, which is also May Day. Then there was morning prayer at S. Philip and evening prayer at S. James, and the bells rang changes and cannons, and went on ringing by turns all the evening, the bellringers being escorted from one church to another with May garlands and a sort of triumphal procession. The churches were decorated, and flags put out on the towers, and everybody in the congregation was expected to carry a nosegay.

Rupert and I and Henrietta and Baby Cecil and the servants always enjoyed this thoroughly, and thought the churches delightfully sweet; but my mother said the smell of the cottage nosegays and the noise of the bells made her feel very ill, which was a pity.

Fred Johnson once told me some wonderful stories about the brother churches. We had gone over the canal to a field not

far from the cricketing field, but it was a sort of water-meadow, and lower down, and opposite to the churches, which made us think of them. We had gone there partly to get yellow flags to try and grow them in tubs as Johnson's father did water-lilies, and partly to watch for a canal-boat, or "monkey-barge," which was expected

fact that people not connected with barges took the liberty of walking on the canal banks.

"He've been a-going up and down with me these fifteen year," said the old man, "and he barks at 'em still." He barked so fiercely at us that Fred would not go on board, to my great annoyance, for I



"Fred knew the old man, and we hoped to go home as part of the cargo, if the old man's dog would let us."

up with coal. Fred knew the old man, and we hoped to go home as part of the cargo if the old man's dog would let us; but he was a rough terrier, with an exaggerated conscience, and strongly objected to anything coming on board the boat which was not in the bill of lading. He could not even reconcile himself to the

never feel afraid of dogs, and was quite sure I could see a disposition to wag about the stumpy tail of the terrier in spite of his "bowfs."

I may have been wrong, but once or twice I fancied that Fred shirked adventures which seemed nothing to me; and I felt this to be very odd, because I

am not as brave as I should like to be, and Fred is grandson to the navy captain.

I think Fred wanted to make me forget the canal-boat, which I followed with regretful eyes, for he began talking about the churches.

"It must be splendid to hear all sixteen bells going at once," said he.

"They never do," said I, unmollified.

"They do—*sometimes*," said Fred slowly, and so impressively that I was constrained to ask "When?"

"In great emergencies," was Fred's reply, which startled me. But we had only lived in the place for part of our lives, and Fred's family belonged to it, so he must know better than I.

"Is it to call the doctor?" I asked, thinking of drowning, and broken bones, and apoplectic fits.

"It's to call everybody," said Fred; "that is in time of war, when the town is in danger. And when the Great Plague was here, S. Philip and S. James both tolled all day long with their bells muffled. But when there's a fire they ring backwards, as witches say prayers, you know."

War and the plague had not been here for a very long time, and there had been no fire in the town in my remembrance; but Fred said that awful calamities of the kind had happened within the memory of man, when the town was still built in great part of wood, and that one night, during a high gale, the whole place, except a few houses, had been destroyed by fire. After this the streets were rebuilt of stone and bricks.

These new tales which Fred told me, of places I knew, had a terrible interest peculiarly their own. For the captain's dangers were over for good now, but war, plague, and fire in the town might come again.

I thought of them by day, and dreamed of them by night. Once I remember being

awakened, as I fancied, by the clanging of the two peals in discordant unison, and as I opened my eyes a bright light on the wall convinced me that the town was on fire. Fred's vivid descriptions rushed to my mind, and I looked out expecting to see S. Philip and S. James standing up like dark rocks in a sea of dancing flames, their bells ringing backwards, "as witches say prayers." It was only when I saw both the towers standing grey and quiet above the grey and quiet town, and when I found that the light upon the wall came from the street lamp below, that my head seemed to grow clearer, and I knew that no bells were ringing, and that those I fancied I heard were only the prolonged echoes of a bad dream.

I was very glad that it was so, and I did not exactly wish for war or the plague to come back; and yet the more I heard of Fred's tales the more restless I grew, because the days were so dull, and because we never went anywhere, and nothing ever happened.



CHAPTER VII.

WE RESOLVE TO RUN AWAY—SCRUPLES—
BABY CECIL—I PREPARE—I RUN AWAY.

I THINK it was Fred's telling me tales of the navy captain's boyhood which put it into our heads that the only way for people at our age, and in our position, to begin a life of adventure is to run away.

The captain had run away. He ran away from school. But then the school was one which it made your hair stand on end to hear of. The master must have been a monster of tyranny, the boys little prodigies of wickedness and misery, and the food such as would have been rejected by respectably reared pigs.

It put his grandson and me at a disadvantage that we had no excuses of the kind for running away from the grammar school. Dr. Jessop was a little pompous, but he was sometimes positively kind. There was not even a cruel usher. I was no dunce, nor was Fred—though he was below me in class—so that we had not even a grievance in connection with our lessons. This made me feel as if there would be something mean and almost dishonourable in running away from school. "I think it would not be fair to the Doctor," said I; "it would look as if he had driven us to it, and he hasn't. We had better wait till the holidays."

Fred seemed more willing to wait than I had expected; but he planned what we were to do when we did go as vigorously as ever.

It was not without qualms that I thought of running away from home. My mother would certainly be greatly alarmed; but then she was greatly alarmed by so many things to which she afterwards became reconciled! My conscience reproached me more about Rupert and Henrietta. Not one of us had longed for "events" and exploits so earnestly as my sister; and who but Rupert had prepared me for emergencies, not perhaps such as the captain had had to cope with, but of the kinds recognised by the yellow leather book? We had been very happy together—Rupert, Henrietta, Baby Cecil, and I—and we had felt in common the one defect of our lives that there were no events in them; and now I was going to begin a life of adventure, to run away and seek my fortune, without even telling them what I was going to do.

On the other hand, that old mean twinge of jealousy was one of my strongest impulses to adventure-seeking, and it urged me to perform my exploits alone. Some people seem to like dangers and adventures

whilst the dangers are going on; Henrietta always seemed to think that the pleasantest part; but I confess that I think one of the best parts must be when they are over and you are enjoying the credit of them. When the captain's adventures stirred me most I looked forward with a thrill of anticipation to my return home—modest from a justifiable pride in my achievements, and so covered with renown by my deeds of daring that I should play second fiddle in the family no more, and that Rupert and Henrietta would outbid each other for my "particular" friendship, and Baby Cecil dog my heels to hear the stories of my adventures.

The thought of Baby Cecil was the heaviest pang I felt when I was dissatisfied with the idea of running away from home. Baby Cecil was the pet of the house. He had been born after my father's death, and from the day he was born everybody conspired to make much of him. Dandy, the Scotch terrier, would renounce a romping ramble with us to keep watch over Baby Cecil when he was really a baby, and was only carried for a dull airing in the nursemaid's arms. I can quite understand Dandy's feelings; for if when one was just preparing for a paper-chase, or anything of that sort, Baby Cecil trotted up and, flinging himself head first into one's arms, after his usual fashion, cried, "Baby Cecil 'ants Charlie to tell him a long, long story—*so much!*" it always ended in one's giving up the race or the scramble, and devoting one's self as sedately as Dandy to his service. But I consoled myself with the thought of how Baby Cecil would delight in me, and what stories I should be able to tell him on my return.

The worst of running away nowadays is that railways and telegrams run faster. I was prepared for any emergency except that of being found and brought home again.

Thinking of this brought to my mind one of Fred's tales of the captain, about how he was pursued by bloodhounds and escaped by getting into water. Water not only retains no scent, it keeps no track. I think perhaps this is one reason why boys so often go to sea when they run away, that no one may be able to follow them. It helped my decision that we would go to sea when we ran away, Fred and I. Besides, there was no other road to strange countries, and no other way of seeing the sea people with the sou'-wester heads.

Fred did not seem to have any scruples about leaving his home, which made me feel how much braver he must be than I. But his head was so full of the plans he made for us, and the lists he drew up of natural products of the earth in various places on which we could live without paying for our living, that he neglected his school work, and got into scrapes about it. This distressed me very much, for I was working my very best that half on purpose that no one might say that we ran away from our lessons, but that it might be understood that we had gone solely in search of adventure, like sea-captains or any other grown-up travellers.

All Fred's tales now began with the word "suppose." They were not stories of what had happened to his grandfather, but of what might happen to us. The half-holiday that Mr. Johnson's hay was carted we sat behind the farthest haycock all the afternoon with an old atlas on our knees, and Fred "supposed" till my brain whirled to think of all that was coming on us. "Suppose we get on board a vessel bound for Singapore, and hide behind some old casks—" he would say, coasting strange continents with his stumpy little forefinger, as recklessly as the captain himself; on which of course I asked, "What is Singapore like?" which enabled Fred to close the atlas and lie back among the hay

and say whatever he could think of and I could believe.

Meanwhile we saved up our pocket-money and put it in a canvas bag, as being sailor-like. Most of the money was Fred's, but he was very generous about this, and said I was to take care of it as I was more managing than he. And we practised tree-climbing to be ready for the masts, and ate earth-nuts to learn to live upon roots in case we were thrown upon a desert island. Of course we did not give up our proper meals, as we were not obliged to yet, and I sometimes felt rather doubtful about how we should feel living upon nothing but roots for breakfast, dinner, and tea. However, I had observed that whenever the captain was wrecked a barrel of biscuits went ashore soon afterwards, and I hoped it might always be so in wrecks, for biscuits go a long way, especially sailors' biscuits, which are large.

I made a kind of handbook for adventure-seekers, too, in an old exercise book, showing what might be expected and should be prepared for in a career like the captain's. I divided it under certain heads: Hardships, Dangers, Emergencies, Wonders, &c. These were subdivided again, thus: Hardships—1, Hunger; 2, Thirst; 3, Cold; 4, Heat; 5, No Clothes; and so forth. I got all my information from Fred, and I read my lists over and over again to get used to the ideas, and to feel brave. And on the last page I printed in red ink the word "Glory."

And so the half went by and came to an end; and when the old Doctor gave me my three prizes, and spoke of what he hoped I would do next half, my blushes were not solely from modest pride.

The first step of our runaway travels had been decided upon long ago. We were to go by barge to London. "And from London you can go anywhere," Fred said.

The day after the holidays began I saw

a canal-boat lading at the wharf, and finding she was bound for London I told Fred of it. But he said we had better wait for a barge, and that there would be one on Thursday. "Or if you don't think you can be ready by then, we can wait for the next," he added. He seemed quite willing to wait, but (remembering that the captain's preparations for his longest voyage had only taken him eighteen and a half minutes by the chronometer, which was afterwards damaged in the diving-bell accident, and which I had seen with my own eyes, in confirmation of the story) I said I should be ready any time at half an hour's notice, and Thursday was fixed as the day of our departure.

To facilitate matters it was decided that Fred should invite me to spend Wednesday with him, and to stay all night, for the barge was to start at half-past six o'clock on Thursday morning.

I was very busy on Wednesday. I wrote a letter to my mother in which I hoped I made it quite clear that ambition and not discontent was leading me to run away. I also made a will, dividing my things fairly between Rupert, Henrietta, and Baby Cecil, in case I should be drowned at sea. My knife, my prayer-book, the ball of string belonging to my kite, and my little tool-box I took away with me. I also took the match-box from the writing-table, but I told mother of it in the letter. The captain used to light his fires by rubbing sticks together, but I had tried it, and thought matches would be much better, at any rate to begin with.

Rupert was lying under the crab-tree, and Henrietta was reading to him, when I went away. Rupert was getting much stronger; he could walk with a stick, and was going back to school next half. I felt a very unreasonable vexation because they seemed quite cheerful. But as I was leaving the garden to go over the fields,

Baby Cecil came running after me, with his wooden spade in one hand and a plant of chickweed in the other, crying: "Charlie, dear! Come and tell Baby Cecil a story." I kissed him, and tied his hat on, which had come off as he ran.

"Not now, Baby," I said; "I am going out now, and you are gardening."

"I don't want to garden," he pleaded. "Where are you going? Take me with you."

"I am going to Fred Johnson's," I said bravely.

Baby Cecil was a very good child, though he was so much petted. He gave a sigh of disappointment, but only said very gravely, "Will you promise, *onyer-onner*, to tell me one when you come back?"

"I promise to tell you lots *when I come back*, on my honour," was my answer.

I had to skirt the garden-hedge for a yard or two before turning off across the meadow. In a few minutes I heard a voice on the other side. Baby Cecil had run down the inside, and was poking his face through a hole, and kissing both hands to me. There came into my head a wonder whether his face would be much changed next time I saw it. I little guessed when and how that would be. But when he cried, "Come back *very soon*, Charlie dear," my imperfect valour utterly gave way, and hanging my head I ran, with hot tears pouring over my face, all the way to Johnson's wharf.

When Fred saw my face he offered to give up the idea if I felt faint-hearted about it. Nothing that he could have said would have dried my tears so soon. Every spark of pride in me blazed up to reject the thought of turning craven now. Besides, I longed for a life of adventure most sincerely; and I was soon quite happy again in the excitement of being so near to what I had longed for.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE GO ON BOARD—THE PIE—AN EXPLOSION—MR. ROWE THE BARGE-MASTER—THE WHITE LION—TWO LETTERS—WE DOUBT MR. ROWE'S GOOD FAITH.

THE dew was still heavy on the grass when Fred and I crossed the drying-ground about five o'clock on Thursday morning, and scrambled through a hedge into our old "coast-guard" corner on the wharf. We did not want to be seen by the barge-master till we were too far from home to be put ashore.

The freshness of early morning in summer has some quality which seems to go straight to the heart. I felt intensely happy. There lay the barge, the sun shining on the clean deck, and from the dewy edges of the old ropes, and from the barge-master's zinc basin and pail put out to sweeten in the air.

"She won't leave us behind this time!" I cried, turning triumphantly to Fred.

"Take care of the pie," said Fred.

It was a meat-pie which he had taken from the larder this morning; but he had told Mrs. Johnson about it in the letter he had left behind him; and had explained that we took it instead of the breakfast we should otherwise have eaten. We felt that earth-nuts might not be forthcoming on the canal banks, or even on the wharf at Nine Elms when we reached London.

At about a quarter to six Johnson's wharf was quite deserted. The barge-master was having breakfast ashore, and the second man had gone to the stable. "We had better hide ourselves now," I said. So we crept out and went on board. We had chosen our hiding-place before. Not in the cabin, of course, nor among

the cargo, where something extra thrown in at the last moment might smother us if it did not lead to our discovery, but in the fore part of the boat, in a sort of well or *hold*, where odd things belonging to the barge itself were stowed away, and made sheltered nooks into which we could creep out of sight. Here we found a very convenient corner, and squatted down, with the pie at our feet, behind a hamper, a box, a coil of rope, a sack of hay, and a very large ball, crossed four ways with rope, and with a rope-tail, which puzzled me extremely.

"It's like a giant tadpole," I whispered to Fred.

"Don't nudge me," said Fred. "My pockets are full, and it hurts."

My pockets were far from light. The money-bag was heavily laden with change—small in value but large in coin. The box of matches was with it and the knife. String, nails, my prayer-book, a pencil, some writing-paper, the handbook, and a more useful hammer than the one in my tool-box filled another pocket. Some gooseberries and a piece of cake were in my trousers, and I carried the tool-box in my hands. We each had a change of linen, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief. Fred would allow of nothing else. He said that when our jackets and trousers were worn out we must make new clothes out of an old sail.

Waiting is very dull work. After awhile, however, we heard voices, and the tramp of the horse, and then the barge-master and Mr. Johnson's foreman and other men kept coming and going on deck, and for a quarter of an hour we had as many hairbreadth escapes of discovery as the captain himself could have had in the circumstances. At last somebody threw the barge-master a bag of something (fortunately soft) which he was leaving behind, and which he chucked on to the top of

my head. Then the driver called to his horse, and the barge gave a jerk, which threw Fred on to the pie, and in a moment more we were gliding slowly and smoothly down the stream.

When we were fairly off we ventured to peep out a little, and stretch our cramped limbs. There was no one on board but the barge-master, and he was at the other end of the vessel, smoking and minding his rudder. The driver was walking on the towing-path by the old grey horse. The motion of the boat was so smooth that we seemed to be lying still whilst villages and orchards and green banks and osier-beds went slowly by, as though the world were coming to show itself to us, instead of our going out to see the world.

When we passed the town we felt some anxiety for fear we should be stopped; but there was no one on the bank, and though the towers of S. Philip and S. James appeared again and again in lessening size as we looked back, there came at last a bend in the canal, when a high bank of gorse shut out the distance, and we saw them no more.

In about an hour, having had no breakfast, we began to speak seriously of the pie. (I had observed Fred breaking little corners from the crust with an absent air more than once.) Thinking of the first subdivision under the word *Hardships* in my handbook, I said, "I'm afraid we ought to wait till we are *worse hungry*."

But Fred said, "Oh no!" And that out adventure-seeking it was quite impossible to save and plan and divide your meals exactly, as you could never tell what might turn up. The captain always said, "Take good luck and bad luck and pot-luck as they come!" So Fred assured me, and we resolved to abide by the captain's rule.

"We may have to weigh out our food

with a bullet, like Admiral Bligh, next week," said Fred.

"So we may," said I. And the thought must have given an extra relish to the beefsteak and hard-boiled eggs, for I never tasted anything so good.

Whether the smell of the pie went aft, or whether something else made the barge-master turn round and come forward, I do not know; but when we were encumbered with open clasp-knives, and full mouths, we saw him bearing down upon us, and in a hasty movement of retreat I lost my balance, and went backward with a crash upon a tub of potatoes.

The noise this made was not the worst part of the business. I was tightly wedged amongst the odds and ends, and the money-bag being sharply crushed against the match-box, which was by this time well warmed, the matches exploded in a body, and whilst I was putting as heroic a face as I could on the pain I was enduring in my right funny-bone, Fred cried, "Your jacket's smoking. You're on fire!"

Whether Mr. Rowe, the barge-master, had learnt presence of mind out of a book, I do not know; but before Fred and I could even think of what to do in the emergency, my jacket was off, the matches were overboard, and Mr. Rowe was squeezing the smouldering fire out of my pocket, rather more deliberately than most men brush their hats. Then, after civilly holding the jacket for me to put it on again, he took off his hat, took his handkerchief out of it, and wiped his head, and replacing both, with his eyes upon us, said, more deliberately still, "Well, young gentlemen, this is a nice start!"

It was impossible to resist the feeling of confidence inspired by Mr. Rowe's manner, his shrewd and stolid appearance, and his promptness in an emergency. Besides, we were completely at his mercy. We appealed to it, and told him our plans.

We offered him a share of the pie too, which he accepted with conscious condescension. When the dish was empty he brought his handkerchief into use once more, and then said, in a peculiarly oracular manner, "You just look to me, young gentlemen, and I'll put you in the way of everything."

The immediate advantage we took of this offer was to ask about whatever interested us in the landscape constantly passing before our eyes, or the barge-furniture at our feet. The cord-compressed balls were shore-fenders, said Mr. Rowe, and were popped over the side when the barge was likely to grate against the shore, or against another vessel.

"Them's osier-beds. They cuts 'em every year or so for basket-work. Wot's that little bird a-hanging head downwards? It's a titmouse looking for insects, that is. There's scores on 'em in the osier-beds. Aye, aye, the yellow lilies is pretty enough, but there's a lake the other way—a mile or two beyond your father's, Master Fred—where there's white water-lilies. They're pretty, if you like! It's a rum thing in spring," continued Mr. Rowe, between puffs of his pipe, "to see them lilies come up from the bottom of the canal; the leaves packed as neat as any parcel, and when they git to the top, they turns down and spreads out on the water as flat as you could spread a cloth upon a table."

As a rule, Mr. Rowe could give us no names for the aquatic plants at which we clutched as we went by, nor for the shells we got out of the mud; but his eye for a water-rat was like a terrier's. It was the only thing which seemed to excite him.

About mid-day we stopped by a village, where Mr. Rowe had business. The horse was to rest and bait here; and the barge-master told us that if we had "a shilling or so about" us, we might dine on excellent bread and cheese at the *White Lion*,

or even go so far as poached eggs and yet more excellent bacon, if our resources allowed of it. We were not sorry to go ashore. There was absolutely no shelter on the deck of the barge from the sunshine, which was glaringly reflected by the water. The inn parlour was low, but it was dark and cool. I felt doubtful about the luxury even of cheese after that beef-steak-pie; but Fred smacked his lips and ordered eggs and bacon, and I paid for them out of the canvas-bag.

As we sat together I said, "I wrote a letter to my mother, Fred. Did you write to Mrs. Johnson?"

Fred nodded, and pulled a scrap of dirty paper from his pocket, saying, "That's the letter; but I made a tidy copy of it afterwards."

I have said that Fred was below me in class, though he is older; and he was very bad at spelling. Otherwise the letter did very well, except for smudges.

DEAR MOTHER,

Charlie and I are going to run away at least by the time you get this we have run away but never mind for wen weve seen the world were cumming back we took the pi wich I hope you wont mind as we had no brekfust and I'll bring back the dish we send our best love and I've no more to tell you to-day from your affectionate son FRED.

I saw Mr. Rowe myself very busy in the bar of the *White Lion*, with a sheet of paper and an old steel pen, which looked as if the point had been attenuated to that hair-like fineness by sheer age. He started at the sight of me, which caused him to drop a very large blot of ink from the very sharp point of the pen on to his paper. I left him wiping it up with his handkerchief. But it never struck me that he was writing a letter on the same subject as

Fred and I had been writing about. He was, however: and Mr. Johnson keeps it tied up with Fred's to this day. The spelling was of about the same order.

MR. JOHNSON. HONERD SIR.

i rites in duty bound to acquaint you that the young gentlemen is with me, looking out for Advenchurs and asking your pardon i wish they may find them as innercent as 2 Babes in the Wood on the London and Lancingford Canal were they come aboard quite unknown to me and blowed theirselves up with lucifers the fust go off and youve no need to trubble yourself sir ill keep my I on them and bring em safe to hand with return cargo and hoping you'll excuse the stamp not expecting to have to rite from the fust stoppage your obedient humble servant

SAMUEL ROWE.

As I have said, we did not suspect that Mr. Rowe had betrayed us by post; but in the course of the afternoon Fred said to me, "I'll tell you what, Charlie, I know old Rowe well, and he's up to any trick, and sure to want to keep in with my father. If we don't take care he'll take us back with him. And what fools we shall look then!"

The idea was intolerable; but I warned Fred to carefully avoid betraying that we suspected him. The captain had had worse enemies to outwit, and had kept a pirate in good humour for a much longer voyage by affability and rum. We had no means of clouding Mr. Rowe's particularly sharp wits with grog, but we resolved to be amiable and wary, and when we did get to London to look out for the first opportunity of giving the barge-master the slip.

CHAPTER IX.

A COASTING VOYAGE—MUSK ISLAND—
LINNET FLASH—MR. ROWE AN OLD TAR
—THE DOG-FANCIER AT HOME.

It was a delightful feature of our first voyage—and one which we could not hope to enjoy so often in voyages to come—that we were always close to land, and this on both sides. We could touch either coast without difficulty, and as the barge stopped several times during the day to rest the horse, Fred and I had more than one chance of going ashore.

I hope to have many a voyage yet, and to see stranger people and places than I saw then, but I hardly hope ever to enjoy myself so much again. I have long ago found out that Fred's stories of the captain's adventures were not true stories, and as I have read and learned more about the world than I knew at that time, I know now that there are only certain things which one can meet with by land or by sea. But when Fred and I made our first voyage in emulation of his grandfather there was no limit to my expectations, or to what we were prepared to see or experience at every fresh bend of the London and Lancingford Canal.

I remember one of Fred's stories about the captain was of his spending a year and a day on an island called Musk Island, in the Pacific. He had left the ship, Fred said, to do a little exploring alone in his gig. Not knowing at that time that the captain's gig is a boat, I was a good deal puzzled, I remember, to think of Mrs. Johnson's red-faced father crossing the sea in a gig like the one Mr. Bustard used to go his professional "rounds" in. And when Fred spoke of his "pulling himself" I was yet more bewildered by the unavoid-

able conclusion that they had no horse on board, and that the gallant and ever-ready captain went himself between the shafts. The wonder of his getting to Musk Island in that fashion was, however, eclipsed by the wonders he found when he did get there. Musk-hedges and bowers ten feet high, with flowers as large as bindweed blossoms, and ladies with pale gold hair all dressed in straw-coloured satin, and with such lovely faces that the captain vowed that no power on earth should move him till he had learned enough of the language to propose the health of the Musk Island beauties in a suitable speech after dinner. "And there he would have lived and died, I believe," Fred would say, "if that first mate, who saved his life before, had not rescued him by main force, and taken him back to his ship."

I am reminded of this story when I think of the island in Linnet Lake, for we were so deeply charmed by it that we very nearly broke our voyage, as the captain broke his, to settle on it.

Mr. Rowe called the lake Linnet Flash. Wherever the canal seemed to spread out, and then go on again narrow and like a river, the barge-master called these lakes "flashes" of the canal. There is no other flash on that canal so large or so beautiful as Linnet Lake, and in the middle of the lake lies the island.

It was about three o'clock, the hottest part of a summer's day, and Fred and I, rather faint with the heat, were sitting on a coil of rope holding a clean sheet, which Mr. Rowe had brought up from the cabin to protect our heads and backs from sun-stroke. We had refused to take shelter below, and sat watching the fields and hedges, which seemed to palpitate in the heat as they went giddily by, and Mr. Rowe, who stood quite steady, conversing coolly with the driver. The driver had been on board for the last hour, the way

being clear, and the old horse quite able to take care of itself and us, and he and the barge-master had pocket-handkerchiefs under their hats like the sou'-wester flaps of the captain's sea-friends. Fred had dropped his end of the sheet to fall asleep, and I was protecting us both, when the driver bawled some directions to the horse in their common language, and the barge-master said, "Here's a bit of shade for you, Master Fred;" and we roused up and found ourselves gliding under the lee of an island covered with trees.

"Oh, *do* stop here!" we both cried.

"Well, I don't mind," said Mr. Rowe, removing his hat, and mopping himself with his very useful pocket-handkerchief. "Jem, there's a bit of grass there, let her have a mouthful."

"I thought you'd like this," he continued; "there ain't a prettier bit between here and Pyebridge."

It was so lovely, that the same idea seized both Fred and me: Why not settle here, at least for a time? It was an uninhabited island, only waiting to be claimed by some adventurous navigator, and obviously fertile. The prospect of blackberries on the mainland was particularly fine, and how they would ripen in this blazing sun! Birds sang in the trees above; fish leaping after flies broke the still surface of the water with a musical splash below; and beyond a doubt there must be the largest and sweetest of earth-nuts on the island, easy to get out of the deep beds of untouched leaf-mould. And when Mr. Rowe cried "Look!" and we saw a water-fowl scud across the lake, leaving a sharp trail like a line of light behind her, we felt that we might spend all our savings in getting to the Pacific Ocean, and not find when we got there a place which offered more natural resources to the desert islander.

If the barge-master would have gone ashore on the mainland out of the way,

and if we could have got ashore on the island without help, we should not have confided our plans to so doubtful a friend. As it was, we were obliged to tell Mr. Rowe that we proposed to found a settlement in Linnet Lake, and he was completely opposed to the idea.

It was only when he said (with that air of reserved and funded knowledge which gave such unfathomable depth to his irony, and made his sayings so oracular)—“There’s very different places in the world to Linnet Flash”—that we began to be ashamed of our hasty enthusiasm, and to think that it would be a pity to stop so short in our adventurous career.

So we decided to go on; but the masterly way in which Mr. Rowe spoke of the world made me think he must have seen a good deal of it, and when we had looked our last upon the island, and had crept with lowered mast under an old brick bridge where young ferns hung down from the archway, and when we were once more travelling between flat banks and coppices that gave us no shelter, I said to the barge-master—“Have you ever been at sea, Mr. Rowe?”

“Seventeen year in the Royal Navy,” said Mr. Rowe, with a strong emphasis upon *teen*, as if he feared we might do him the injustice of thinking he had only served his Queen and country for seven.

For the next two hours Fred and I sat, indifferent alike to the sunshine and the shore, in rapt attention to Mr. Rowe’s narrative of his experiences at sea under the flag that has

“Braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze.”

I believe Fred enjoyed them simply as stories, but they fanned in my heart that restless fever for which sea-breezes are the only cure. I think Mr. Rowe got excited himself as he recalled old times. And

when he began to bawl sea-songs with a voice like an Atlantic gale, and when he vowed in cadence

“A sailor’s life is the life for me,”

I felt that it was the life for me also, and expressed myself so strongly to that effect that Mr. Rowe became alarmed for the consequences of his indiscretion, and thenceforward told us sea-stories with the obvious and quite futile intention of disgusting me with what I already looked upon as my profession.

But the barge-master’s rapid change of tactics convinced me more and more that we could not safely rely on him to help us in our plans.

About five o’clock he made tea on board, and boiled the water on the little stove in the cabin. I was very anxious to help, and it was I who literally made the tea, whilst Mr. Rowe’s steadier hand cut thick slices of bread and butter from a large loaf. There was only one cup and saucer. Fred and I shared the cup, and the barge-master took the saucer. By preference, he said, as the tea cooled quicker.

The driver had tea after we returned to the deck and could attend to the horse and boat.

Except the island in Linnet Lake, the most entertaining events of the first day of our voyage were our passing villages or detached houses on the canal banks.

Of the latter by far the most interesting was that of a dog-fancier, from whose residence melodious howls, in the dog-dialect of every tribe deserving to be represented in so choice a company, were wafted up the stream, and met our ears before our eyes beheld the landing-stage of the establishment, where the dog-fancier and some of his dogs were lounging in the cool of the evening, and glad to see the barge.

The fancier knew Mr. Rowe, and re-

freshed him (and us) with shandy-gaff in horn tumblers. Some of the dogs who did not, barked incessantly at us, wagging their tails at the same time, however, as if they had some doubts of the correctness of their judgment in the matter. One very small, very white, and very fluffy toy-dog, with a dove-coloured ribbon, was—no doubt—incurably ill-tempered and inhospitable; but a large brindled bull-dog, trying politely but vainly to hide his teeth and tongue, wagged what the fancier had left him of a tail, and dribbled with the pleasure of making our acquaintance, after the wont of his benevolent and much-maligned family. I have since felt pretty certain that Mr. Rowe gave his friend a sketch of our prospects and intentions in the same spirit in which he had written to Mr. Johnson, and I distinctly overheard the dog-fancier make some reply, in which the words “offer a reward” were audible. But the barge-master shook his head at suggestions probably drawn from his friend’s professional traditions, though the fancier told him some very good story about the ill-tempered toy-dog, to which he referred with such violent jerks of the head as threatened to throw his fur cap on to that of the brindled gentleman who sat dripping and smiling at his feet.

When Mr. Rowe began to tell him something good in return, and in spite of my utmost endeavours not to hear anything, the words “Linnet Flash” became audible, I blushed to hear the fancier choking over his shandy-gaff with laughter, I feared at our project for settling on the island.

The interview was now at an end, but as Mr. Rowe stepped briskly on board, the fur cap nodded to the forehatch, where Fred and I were sitting on coiled ropes, and the fancier said very knowingly, “The better the breed the gamier the beast.”

He patted the bull-dog as he said it, and the bull-dog kissed his dirty hand.

“Hup to hanythink,” were Mr. Rowe’s parting words, as he went aft, and the driver called to his horse.

He may have referred to the bull-dog, but I had some doubts about it, even then.



CHAPTER X.

LOCKS—WE THINK OF GOING ON THE
TRAMP—PYE-BRIDGE—WE SET SAIL.

DURING our first day’s voyage we passed two locks. There was one not very far from home, and Fred and I had more than once been to see a barge pass it, sitting on the bank whilst the boat gradually sank to the level of the water below.

It was great fun being on board whilst the barge went down and down, though I must say we did not feel anything peculiar, we sank so gradually.

“Just fancy if it was a hole in the ship’s bottom,” said Fred, “and we were settling down with all on board. Some ships do, and are never heard of again.”

We amused ourselves as we went along by guessing beforehand on which shore the next house or hamlet would appear. We betted shillings on the result, but neither of us won or lost, for however often the shillings changed hands, they remained in the canvas bag.

Perhaps places look more as if events happened in them if you do not know them well. I noticed that even our town looked more interesting from the water than I had ever seen it look, so I dare say to strangers it does not appear so dull as it is. All the villages on the canal banks looked interesting. We passed one soon

after tea, where the horse rested under some old willows by the towing-path, and we and Mr. Rowe went ashore. Whilst the barge-master delivered a parcel to a friend, Fred and I strolled into a lane which led us past cottages with very gay gardens to the church. The church was not at all like S. Philip or S. James. It was squat, and ivy-covered, and carefully restored; and it stood in a garden where the flowers almost hid the graves. Just outside the lych-gate, four lanes met, and all of them were so shady and inviting, and it was so impossible to say what they might not lead to, that I said to Fred:

"You said the only way to run away besides going to sea was to *tramp*. It sounds rather low, but we needn't beg, and I think walking would be nice for a change, and I don't believe it would be much slower than the barge, and it would be so much shadier. And we could get off from Old Rowe at once, and hide if we heard anybody coming. I wonder how far it is to London now?"

"Not far, I dare say," said Fred, who was pleased by the idea; "and if we keep on we must get there in time. And we can get things to eat in the hedges, which we can't do on the barge."

At this moment there passed a boy, to whom I said, "Which is the way to London, if you please?" for there were four roads to choose from.

"What d' you say?" said the boy.

I repeated my question.

"Dunno," he replied, trying to cram half his hand into his mouth. The captain would have thought him very stupid if he had met him as a native in one of the islands of the Pacific, I am sure; but I followed him, and begged him to try and think if he had not heard of people going to London.

At last his face brightened. He was looking over my head down the lane.

"There's a man a-cummin yonder's always a-going to Lunnun," said he. Visions of a companion on our tramp—also perhaps in search of adventures—made me look briskly round. "Him with the pipe, as b'longs to the barge," the boy exclaimed.

It was indeed Mr. Rowe come to look for us, and we had to try and seem glad to see him, and to go on board once more.

Towards evening the canal banks became dotted with fishers of all ages and degrees, fishing very patiently, though they did not seem to catch much.

Soon after dark we reached the town of Pyebridge.

When the barge lay-to for the night, and the driver was taking the horse away to a stable, Mr. Rowe confronted us, in his firmest manner, with the question, "And where are you going to sleep, young gentlemen?"

"Where are *you* going to sleep, Mr. Rowe?" said I, after a thoughtful pause.

"I sleeps below, but the captain's cabin is guv up to no one—unless it be the Queen," replied the barge-master, humourously but decidedly.

"We should like to sleep on deck," said I.

But Mr. Rowe would not hear of it, on account of various dreadful diseases which he assured us would be contracted by sleeping "in the damps of the water," "the dews of the hair," and "the rays of the moon."

"There's a hotel——" he began; but I said at once, "We couldn't afford a hotel, but if you know of any very cheap place we should be much obliged."

Mr. Rowe took off his hat and took out his handkerchief, though it was no longer hot. Having cleared his brain, he said he "would see," and he finally led us along one of the pebbled streets of Pyebridge to a small house with a small shop-window

for the sale of vegetables, and with a card announcing that there were beds to let. A very little old woman got up from behind a very big old geranium in the window as we entered, and with her Mr. Rowe made our arrangements for the night. We got a clean bed, and had a mug of milk and a slice of bread and treacle apiece for breakfast the next morning; and I paid two shillings. As I thanked the old lady and bade her good day, she called to me to hold out my hat, which she filled with cherries, and then stood at the door and watched us out of sight.

There was a railway station in Pye-bridge, and we might easily have escaped from Mr. Rowe, and gone by train to London. But besides the fact that our funds were becoming low, the water had a new attraction for us. We had left the canal behind, and were henceforward on a river. If the wind favoured us we were to sail.

"A canal's nothing to a river," said Mr. Rowe, "same as a river's nothing to the sea," and when Fred had some difficulty in keeping his hat on in the gusty street (mine was in use as a fruit-basket), and the barge-master said it was a "nice fresh morning," I felt that life on Linnet Island would have been tame indeed compared to the hopes and fears of a career which depended on the winds and waves.

And when the boom went up the barge's mast, and the tightly corded roll of dark canvas began to struggle for liberty, and writhe and flap with throttling noises above our heads, and when Mr. Rowe wrestled with it and the driver helped him, and Fred and I tried to, and were all but swept overboard in consequence, whilst the barge-master encouraged himself by strange and savage sounds—and when the sunshine caught our nut-brown sail just as she spread gallantly to the breeze, our excitement grew till we both cried in one breath:

"This is something *like* being at sea!"

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ROWE ON BARGE-WOMEN—THE RIVER
—NINE ELMS—A MYSTERIOUS NOISE—
ROUGH QUARTERS—A CHEAP SUPPER—
JOHN'S BERTH—WE MAKE OUR ESCAPE
—OUT INTO THE WORLD.

MR. ROWE is quite right. A canal is nothing to a river.

There was a wide piece of water between us and one of the banks now, and other barges went by us, some sailing, some towing only, and two or three with women at the rudder, and children on the deck.

"I wouldn't have my wife and family on board for something!" said Mr. Rowe grimly.

"Have you got a family, Mr. Rowe?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir," said the barge-master. "I have, like other folk. But women and children's best ashore."

"Of course they are," said I.

"If you was to turn over in your mind what they *might* be good for now, he continued, with an unfathomable eye on the mistress of a passing canal-boat, "you'd say washing the decks and keeping the pots clean. And they don't do it as well as a man—not by half."

"They seem to steer pretty well," said I.

"I've served in very different vessels to what I'm in now," said Mr. Rowe, avoiding a reply, "and I *may* come as low as a monkey-barge and coal; but I'm blessed if ever I see myself walk on the towing-path and leave the missus in command on board."

At this moment a barge came sailing alongside of us.

"Oh look!" cried Fred, "it's got a white horse painted on the sail."

"That's a lime barge, sir," said Mr. Rowe; "all lime barges is marked that way."

She was homeward bound, and empty, and soon passed us, but we went at a pretty good pace ourselves. The wind kept favourable, a matter in which Fred and I took the deepest interest. We licked our fingers, and held them up to see which side got cooled by the breeze, and whenever this experiment convinced me that it was still behind us, I could not help running back to Fred to say with triumph, "The wind's dead aft," as if he knew nothing about it.

At last this seemed to annoy him, so I went to contain myself by sitting on the potato-tub and watching the shore.

We got into the Thames earlier than usual, thanks to the fair wind.

The world is certainly a very beautiful place. I suppose when I get right out into it, and go to sea, and to other countries, I shall think nothing of England and the Thames, but it was all new and wonderful to Fred and me then. The green slopes and fine trees, and the houses with gardens down to the river, and boats rocking by the steps, the osier islands, which Mr. Rowe called "Aits," and the bridges where the mast had to be lowered, all the craft on the water—the red-sailed barges with one man on board—the steamers with crowded decks and gay awnings—the schooners, yachts, and pleasure boats—and all the people on shore, the fishers, and the people with water-dogs and sticks, the ladies with fine dresses and parasols, and the ragged boys who cheered us as we went by—everything we saw and heard delighted us, and the only sore place in my heart was where I longed for Rupert and Henrietta to enjoy it too.

Later on we saw London. It was in the moonlight that we passed Chelsea. Mr. Rowe pointed out the Hospital, in

which the pensioners must have been asleep, for not a wooden leg was stirring. In less than half an hour afterwards we were at the end of our voyage.

The first thing which struck me about Nine Elms was that they were not to be seen. I had thought of those elms more than once under the burning sun of the first day. I had imagined that we should land at last on some green bank, where the shelter of a majestic grove might tempt Mr. Rowe to sleep, while Fred and I should steal gently away to the neighbouring city, and begin a quite independent search for adventures. But I think I must have mixed up with my expectations a story of one of the captain's escapes—from a savage chief in a mango-grove.

Our journey's end was not quite what I had thought it would be, but it was novel and interesting enough. We seemed to have thoroughly got to the town. Very old houses with feeble lights in their paper-patched windows made strange reflections on the river. The pier looked dark and dirty even by moonlight, and threw blacker and stranger shadows still.

Mr. Rowe was busy and tired, and—we thought—a little inclined to be cross.

"I wonder where we shall sleep!" said Fred, looking timidly up at the dark old houses.

I have said before that I find it hard work to be very brave after dark, but I put a good face on the matter, and said I dared say old Rowe would find us a cheap bedroom.

"London's an awful place for robbers and murders, you know," said Fred.

I was hoping the cold shiver running down my back was due to what the barge-master called "the damps from the water"—when a wail like the cry of a hurt child made my skin stiffen into goose-prickles. A wilder moan succeeded, and then one of the windows of one of the dark houses was

opened, and something thrown out which fell heavily down. Mr. Rowe was just coming on board again, and I found courage in the emergency to gasp out, "What was that?"

"Wot's wot?" said Mr. Rowe testily.

"That noise and the falling thing."

"Somebody throwing somethin' at a cat," said the barge-master. "Stand aside, sir, *if* you please."

It was a relief, but when at length Mr. Rowe came up to me with his cap off, in the act of taking out his handkerchief, and said, "I suppose you're no richer than you was yesterday, young gentlemen—how about a bed?"—I said, "No—o. That is, I mean if you can get us a cheap one in a safe—I mean a respectable place."

"If you leaves a comfortable 'ome, sir," moralised the barge-master, "to go a-looking for adventures in this fashion, you must put up with rough quarters, and wot you can get."

"We'll go anywhere you think right, Mr. Rowe," said I diplomatically.

"I knows a waterman," said Mr. Rowe, "that was in the Royal Navy like myself. He lives near here, and they're decent folk. The place is a poor place, but you'll have to make the best of it, young gentlemen, and a shilling 'll cover the damage. If you wants supper you must pay for it. Give the missis the money, and she'll do the best she can, and bring you the change to a half-farthing."

My courage was now fully restored, but Fred was very much overwhelmed by the roughness of the streets we passed through, the drunken, quarrelling, poverty-struck people, and the grim, dirty old houses.

"We shall be out of it directly," I whispered, and indeed in a few minutes more Mr. Rowe turned up a shabby entry, and led us to one of several lower buildings round a small court. The house he stopped at was cleaner within than without, and the woman was very civil.

"It's a very poor place, sir," said she; "but we always keep a berth, as his father calls it, for our son John."

"But we can't take your son's bed," said I; "we'll sit up here, if you will let us."

"Bless ye, love," said the woman, "John's in foreign parts. He's a sailor, sir, like his father before him; but John's in the merchant service."

Mr. Rowe now bade us good-night. "I'll be round in the morning," said he.

"What o'clock, Mr. Rowe?" I asked; I had a reason for asking.

"There ain't much in the way of return cargo," he replied; "but I've a bit of business to do for your father, Mr. Fred, that'll take me until half-past nine. I'll be here by then, young gentlemen, and show you about a bit."

"It's roughish quarters for you," added the barge-master, looking round; "but you'll find rougher quarters at sea, Master Charles."

Mr. Rowe's moralisings nettled me, and they did no good, for my whole thoughts were now bent on evading his guardianship and getting to sea, but poor Fred was quite overpowered. "I wish we were safe home again," he almost sobbed when I went up to the corner into which he had huddled himself.

"You'll be all right when we're afloat," said I.

"I'm so hungry," he moaned.

I was hungry myself, and decided to order some supper, so when the woman came up and civilly asked if she could do anything for us before we went to bed, I said, "If you please we're rather hungry, but we can't afford anything very expensive. Do you think you can get us anything—rather cheap—for supper?"

"A red herring?" she suggested.

"What price are they?" I felt bound to inquire.

"Mrs. Jones has them beautiful and mild at two for a penny. You *can* get 'em at three a penny, but you wouldn't like 'em, sir."

I felt convinced by the expression of her face that I should not, so I ordered two.

"And a penny loaf?" suggested our landlady, getting her bonnet from behind the door.

"If you please."

"And a bunch of radishes and a pint of fourpenny would be fivepence-halfpenny the lot, sir."

"If you please. And, if you please, that will do," said I, drawing a shilling from the bag, for the thought of the herrings made me ravenous, and I wanted her to go. She returned quickly with the bread and herrings. The "fourpenny" proved to be beer. She gave me sixpence-halfpenny in change, which puzzled my calculations.

"You said *fourpenny*," said I, indicating the beer.

"Yes, sir, but it's a pint," was the reply; and it was only when in after-years I learned that beer at fourpence a quart is known to some people as "fourpenny" that I got that part of the reckoning of the canvas bag straight in my own mind.

The room had an unwholesome smell about it, which the odour from our fried herrings soon pleasantly overpowered. The bread was good, and the beer did us no harm. Fred picked up his spirits again, when Mr. Rowe's old mate came home he found us very cheerful and chatty. Fred asked him about the son who was at sea, but I had some more important questions to put, and I managed so to do, and with a sufficiently careless air.

"I suppose there are lots of ships at London?" said I.

"In the Docks, sir, plenty," said our host.

"And where are the Docks," I inquired.

"Are they far from you?"

"Well, you see, sir, there's a many docks. There's the East India Docks, St. Katharine's Docks, and the Commercial Docks, and Victoria Dock, and lots more."

I pondered. Ships in the East India Dock probably went only to India. St. Katharine conveyed nothing to my mind. I did not fancy Commercial Docks. I felt a loyal inclination towards the Victoria Dock.

"How do people get from here to Victoria Dock now, if they want to?" I asked.

"Well, of course, sir, you can go down the river, or part that way and then by rail from Fenchurch Street."

"Where is Fenchurch Street, Mr. Smith?" said I, becoming a good deal ashamed of my pertinacity.

"In the city, sir," said Mr. Smith.

The city! Now I never heard of any one in any story going out into the world to seek his fortune, and coming to a city, who did not go into it to see what was to be seen. Leaving the king's only daughter and those kinds of things, which belong to story-books, out of the question, I do not believe the captain would have passed a new city without looking into it.

"You go down the river to Fenchurch Street—in a barge?" I suggested.

"Bless ye, no, sir!" said Mr. Smith, getting the smoke of his pipe down his throat the wrong way with laughing, till I thought his coughing-fit would never allow him to give me the important information I required. "There's boats, sir, plenty on 'em. I could take you myself, and be thankful, and there's steamers calls at the wharf every quarter of an hour or so through the day, from nine in the morning, and takes you to London Bridge for threepence. It ain't many minutes' walk to Fenchurch Street, and the train takes you straight to the Docks."

After this we conversed on general sea-

faring matters. Mr. Smith was not a very able-bodied man, in consequence of many years' service in unhealthy climates, he said; and he complained of his trade as a "poor one," and very different from what it had been in his father's time, and before new London Bridge was built, which "anybody and anything could get through" now without watermen's assistance. In his present depressed condition he seemed to look back on his seafaring days with pride and tender regret, and when we asked for tales of his adventures he was checked by none of the scruples which withheld Mr. Rowe from encouraging me to be a sailor.

"John's berth" proved to be a truckle-bed in a closet which just held it, and which also held more nasty smells than I could have believed there was room for. Opening the window seemed only to let in fresh ones. When Fred threw himself on his face on the bed, and said, "What a beastly hole!" and cried bitterly, I was afraid he was going to be ill; and when I had said my prayers and persuaded him to say his and come to bed, I thought that if we got safely through the night we would make the return voyage with Mr. Rowe, and for the future leave events and emergencies to those who liked danger and discomfort.

But when we woke with the sun shining on our faces, and through the little window beheld it sparkling on the river below us, and on the distant city, we felt all right again, and stuck to our plans.

"Let's go by the city," said Fred, "I should like to see some of the town."

"If we don't get off before half-past nine we're lost," said I.

We found an unexpected clog in Mr. Smith, who seemed inclined to stick to us and repeat the stories he had told us overnight. At about half-past eight, however, he went off to his boat, saying he

supposed we should wait for Mr. Rowe, and when his wife went into a neighbour's house I laid a shilling on the table, and Fred and I slipped out and made our way to the pier.

Mr. Rowe was not there, and a church clock near struck nine. This was echoed from the city more than once, and then we began to look anxiously for the steamer. Five, ten minutes must have passed—they seemed hours to me—when I asked a man who was waiting also when the steamer from London Bridge would come.

"She'll be here soon," said he.

"So will old Rowe," whispered Fred.

But the steamer came first, and we went on board; and the paddles began to splash, and our escape was accomplished.

It was a lovely morning, and the tall, dirty old houses looked almost grand in the sunlight as we left Nine Elms. The distant city came nearer and shone brighter, and when the fretted front of the Houses of Parliament went by us like a fairy palace, and towers and blocks of buildings rose solidly one behind another in shining tints of white and grey against the blue summer sky, and when above the noise of our paddle-wheels came the distant roar of the busy streets—Fred pressed the arm I had pushed through his and said, "We're out in the world at last!"

CHAPTER XII.

EMERGENCIES AND POLICEMEN — FENCHURCH STREET STATION—THIRD CLASS
TO CUSTOM HOUSE—A SHIP FOREST.

POLICEMEN are very useful people. I do not know how we should have got from the London Bridge Pier to the Fenchurch

Street Station if it had not been that Fred told me he knew one could ask policemen the way to places. There is nothing to pay, which I was very glad of, as the canvas bag was getting empty.

Once or twice they helped us through emergencies. We had to go from one footpath to another, straight across the street, and the street was so full of carts and cabs and drays and omnibuses, that one could see that it was quite an impossibility. We did it, however, for the policeman made us. I said, "Hadn't we better wait till the crowd has gone?" But the policeman laughed, and said then we had better take lodgings close by and wait at the window. So we did it. Fred said the captain once ran in a little cutter between two big ships that were firing into him, but I do not think that can have been much worse than running between a backing dray, full of rolling barrels, and a hansom cab pulled up and ramping like a rocking-horse at the lowest point of the rockers.

When we were safely on the other pavement we thanked the policeman very much, and then went on, asking our way till we got to Fenchurch Street.

If anything could smell nastier than John's berth in Nine Elms it is Fenchurch Street Station. And I think it is worse in this way: John's berth smelt horribly, but it was warm and weather-tight. You never swallow a drop of pure air in Fenchurch Street Station, and yet you cannot find a corner in which you can get out of the draughts.

With one gale blowing on my right from an open door, and another gale blowing on my left down some steps, and nasty smells blowing from every point of the compass, I stood at a dirty little hole in a dirty wooden wall and took our tickets. I had to stand on tiptoe to make the young man see me.

"What is the cheapest kind of tickets you have, if you please?" I inquired, with the canvas bag in my hand.

"Third class," said the young man, staring very hard at me, which I thought rather rude. "Except working men's tickets, and they're not for this train."

"Two third-class tickets for Victoria Dock, then, if you please," said I.

"Single or return?" said he.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, for I was puzzled.

"Are you coming back to-day?" he inquired.

"Oh dear, no!" said I, for some of the captain's voyages had lasted for years; but the question made me anxious, as I knew nothing of railway rules, and I added, "Does it matter?"

"Not by no means," replied the young man smartly, and he began to whistle, but stopped himself to ask, "Custom House or Tidal Basin?"

I had no alternative but to repeat, "I beg your pardon?"

He put his face right through the hole and looked at me. "Will you take your ticket for Custom House or Tidal Basin?" he repeated; "either will do for Victoria Docks."

"Then whichever you please," said I, as politely as I could.

The young man took out two tickets and snapped them impatiently in something; and as a fat woman was squeezing me from behind, I was glad to take what I could get and go back to Fred.

He was taking care of our two bundles and the empty pie-dish.

That pie-dish was a good deal in our way. Fred wanted to get rid of it, and said he was sure his mother would not want us to be bothered with it; but Fred had promised in his letter to bring it back, and he could not break his word. I told him so, but I said as he did not like to

be seen with it I would carry it. So I did.

With a strong breeze aft, we were driven upstairs in the teeth of a gale, and ran before a high wind down a platform where, after annoying one of the railway men very much by not being able to guess which was the train, and having to ask him, we got in among a lot of rough-looking people, who were very civil and kind. A man with a black face and a white jacket said he would tell us when we got to Custom House, and he gave me his seat by the window, that I might look out.

What struck me as rather odd was that everybody in the third-class carriage seemed to have bundles like ours, and yet they couldn't all be running away. One thin woman with a very troublesome baby had three. Perhaps it is because portmanteaus and things of that sort are rather expensive.

Fred was opposite to me. It was a bright sunny morning, a fresh breeze blew, and in the sunlight the backs of endless rows of shabby houses looked more cheerful than usual, though very few of the gardens had anything in them but dirt and cats, and very many of the windows had the week's wash hanging out on strings and poles. The villages we had passed on the canal banks all looked pretty and interesting, but I think that most of the places we saw out of the window of the train would look very ugly on a dull day.

I fancy there were poplar-trees at a place called Poplar, and that I thought it must be called after them; but Fred says No, and we have never been there since, so I cannot be sure about it. If not, I must have dreamt it.

I did fall asleep in the corner, I know, I was so very much tired, and we had had no breakfast, and I sat on the side where the wind blows in, which I think helped

to make me sleepy. I was wakened partly by the pie-dish slipping off my lap, and partly by Fred saying in an eager tone:

"Oh, Charlie! LOOK! *Are they all ships?*"

We stuffed our heads through the window, and my hat was nearly blown away, so the man with the black face and the white jacket gave it to the woman with the troublesome baby to take care of for me, and he held us by our legs for fear we should fall out.

On we flew! There was wind enough in our faces to have filled the barge-sail three times over, and Fred licked his lips and said, "I do believe there's salt in it!"

But what he woke me up to show me drove me nearly wild. When I had seen a couple of big barges lying together with their two bare masts leaning towards each other I used to think how dignified and beautiful they looked. But here were hundreds of masts, standing as thick as tree-trunks in a fir-wood, and they were not bare poles, but lofty and slender, and crossed by innumerable yards, and covered with ropes in orderly profusion, which showed in the sunshine as cobwebs shine out in a field in summer. Gay flags and pennons fluttered in the wind; brown sails, grey sails, and gleaming white sails went up and down; and behind it all the water sparkled and dazzled our eyes like the glittering reflections from a mirror moving in the sun.

As we ran nearer the ropes looked thicker, and we could see the devices on the flags. And suddenly, straining his eyes at the yards of a vessel in the thick of the ship-forest, on which was something black, like a spider with only four legs, Fred cried, "It's a sailor!"

I saw him quite well. And seeing him higher up than on any tree one could ever climb, with the sunny sky above him and

the shining water below him, I could only mutter out with envious longing—"How happy he must be!"



CHAPTER XIII.

A DIRTY STREET—A BAD BOY—SHIPPING AND MERCHANDISE—WE STOWAWAY ON BOARD THE "ATALANTA"—A SALT TEAR.

THE man in the white jacket helped us out, smiling as he did so, so that his teeth shone like ivory in his black face. We took the pie-dish and our bundles, and thanked him very much, and the train went on and took him with it, which we felt sorry for. For when one *is* out in the world, you know, one sometimes feels rather lonely, and sorry to part with a kind friend.

Everybody else went through a little gate into the street, so we did the same. It was a very dirty street, with houses on *one* side and the railway on the other. There were cabbages and carrots and old shoes and fishes' heads and oyster-shells and potato-peelings in the street, and a goat was routing among it all with its nose, as if it had lost something and hoped to find it by-and-by.

Places like this always seemed to depress Fred's courage. Besides which, he was never in good spirits when he had to go long without food, which made me fear he would not bear being cast adrift at sea without provisions as well as his grandfather had done. I was not surprised when he said:

"*What* a place! And I don't believe one can get anything fit to eat, and I am so hungry!"

I looked at the houses. There was a

pork-butcher's shop, and a real butcher's shop, and a slop shop, and a seedy jeweller's shop with second-hand watches, which looked as if nothing would ever make them go, and a small toy and sweetmeat shop, but not a place that looked like breakfast. I had taken Fred's bundle because he was so tired, and I suppose it was because I was staring helplessly about that a dirty boy a good deal bigger than either of us came up and pulled his dirty hair and said:

"Carry your things for you, sir?"

"No, thank you," said I, moving on with the bundles and the pie-dish; but as the boy would walk by me I said:

"We want some breakfast very much, but we haven't much money." And, remembering the cost of our supper, I added, "Could we get anything here for about twopence-halfpenny or threepence apiece?"

There was a moment's pause, and then the boy gave a long whistle.

"Vy, I thought you wos swells!" said he.

I really do not know whether it was because I did not like to be supposed to be a poor person when it came to the point, or whether it was because of that bad habit of mine of which even Weston's ballad has not quite cured me, of being ready to tell people more about my affairs than it can be interesting for them to hear or discreet for me to communicate, but I replied at once: "We are gentlemen; but we are going in search of adventures, and we don't want to spend more money than we can help till we see what we may want it for when we get to foreign countries."

"You're going to sea, then, hare you?" said the boy, keeping up with us.

"Yes," said I; "but could you tell us where to get something to eat before we go?"

"There's a shop I knows on," said our

new friend, "where they sell prime pudding at a penny a slice. The plums goes all through and no mistake. Three slices would be threepence: one for you, one for him, and one for my trouble in showing you the way. Threepence more's a quart of stout, and we drink fair by turns. Shall I take your purse and pay it for you? They might cheat a stranger."

"No, thank you," said I; "but we should like some pudding if you will show us the way."

The slices were small, but then they were very heavy. We had two each. I rejected the notion of porter, and Fred said he was not thirsty; but I turned back again into the shop to ask for a glass of water for myself. The woman gave it me very civilly, looking as she did so with a puzzled manner, first at me and then at my bundles and the pie-dish. As she took back the tumbler she nodded her head towards the dirty boy, who stood in the doorway, and said:

"Is that young chap a companion of yours, my dear?"

"Oh, dear no," said I, "only he showed us the way here."

"Don't have nothing to do with him," she whispered; "he's a bad un."

In spite of this warning, however, as there was no policeman to be seen, and the boy would keep up with us, I asked him the way to Victoria Dock.

It was not so easy to get to the ships as I had expected. There were gates to pass through, and they were kept by a porter. He let some people in and turned others back.

"Have you got an order to see the docks?" asked the boy.

I confessed that we had not, but added that we wanted very much to get in.

"My eyes!" said the bad boy, doubling himself in a fit of amusement, "I believe you're both going for stowaways."

"What do you mean by stowaways?" I asked.

"Stowaways is chaps that hides aboard vessels going out of port, to get their passage free gratis for nothing."

"Do a good many manage it?" I asked with an anxious mind.

"There ain't a vessel leaves the docks without one and sometimes more aboard. The captain never looks that way, not by no accident whatsoever. He don't lift no tarpaulins while the ship's in dock. But when she gets to sea the captain gets his eyesight back, and he takes it out of the stowaways for their wittles then. Oh, yes, rather so!" said the bad boy.

There was a crowd at the gates.

"Hold your bundles down on your right side," said the boy, "and go in quickly after any respectable-looking cove you see."

Fred had got his own bundle now, and we followed our guide's directions, and went through the gates after an elderly, well-dressed man. The boy seemed to try to follow us, squeezing very close up to me, but the gatekeeper stopped him. When we were on the other side I saw him bend down and wink backwards at the gatekeeper through his straddled legs. Then he stood derisively on his head. After which he went away as a catherine-wheel, and I saw him no more.

We were among the ships at last! Vessels very different from Mr. Rowe's barge, or even the threepenny steamboat. Lofty and vast, with shining decks of marvellous cleanliness, and giant figure-heads like remembered Jins out of some Arabian tale. Streamers of many colours high up in the forest of masts, and seamen of many nations on the decks and wharves below, moved idly in the breeze, which was redolent of many kinds of cargo. Indeed, if the choice of our ship had not been our chief care, the docks and ware-

houses would have fascinated us little less than the shipping. Here were huge bales of cotton packed as thickly as bricks in a brick-field. There were wine-casks innumerable, and in another place the air was aromatic with so large a cargo of coffee that it seemed as if no more could be required in this country for some generations.

It was very entertaining, and Fred was always calling to me to look at something new, but my mind was with the shipping. There was a good deal of anxiety on it too. The sooner we chose our ship and "stowed away" the better. I hesitated between sailing-vessels and steamers. I did not believe that one of the captain's adventures happened on board any ship that could move faster than it could sail. And yet I was much attracted by some grand-looking steamships. Even their huge funnels had a look of power, I thought, among the masts, like old and hollow oaks in a wood of young and slender trees.

One of these was close in dock, and we could see her well. There were some casks on deck, and by them lay a piece of tarpaulin which caught my eye, and recalled what the bad boy had said about captains and stowaways. Near the gangway were standing two men who did not seem to be sailors. They were respectably dressed, one had a book and a pencil, and they looked, I thought, as if they might have authority to ask our business in the docks, so I drew Fred back under shelter of some piled-up boxes.

"When does she sail?" asked the man with the book.

"To-morrow morning, sir," replied the other.

And then they crossed the gangway and went into a warehouse opposite.

It was noon, and being the men's dinner-time, the docks were not very busy.

At this moment there was not a soul in sight. I grasped Fred's arm, and hoisted the bundle and pie-dish well under my own.

"That's our ship," I said triumphantly; "come along!"

We crossed the gangway unperceived. "The casks!" I whispered, and we made our way to the corner I had noticed. If Fred's heart beat as chokingly as mine did, we were far too much excited to speak, as we settled ourselves into a corner, not quite as cosy as our hiding-place in the forehold of the barge; and drew the tarpaulin over our heads, resting some of the weight of it on the casks behind, that we might not be smothered.

I have waited for the kitchen kettle to boil when Fred and I wanted to make "hot grog" with raspberry-vinegar and nutmeg at his father's house; I have waited for a bonfire to burn up, when we wanted to roast potatoes; I have waited for it to leave off raining when my mother would not let us go out for fear of catching colds; but I never knew time pass so slowly as when Fred and I were stowaways on board the steam-ship *Atalanta*.

He was just beginning to complain, when we heard men coming on board. This amused us for a bit, but we were stowed so that we could not see them, and we dared not look out. Neither dared we speak, except when we heard them go a good way off, and then we whispered. So second after second, and minute after minute, and hour after hour went by, and Fred became very restless.

"She's to sail in the morning," I whispered.

"But where are we to get dinner and tea and supper?" asked Fred indignantly. I was tired, and felt cross on my own account.

"You said yourself we might have to weigh out our food with a bullet like Admiral Bligh, next week."

"He must have had something, or he couldn't have weighed it," retorted Fred; "and how do we know if they'll ever give us anything to eat on board this ship?"

"I dare say we can buy food at first, till they find us something to do for our meals," said I.

"How much money is there left?" asked Fred.

I put my hand into my pocket for the canvas bag—but it was gone!

There could be little doubt that the bad boy had picked my pocket at the gate, but I had a sense of guiltiness about it, for most of the money was Fred's. This catastrophe completely overwhelmed him, and he cried and grumbled till I was nearly at my wits' end. I could not stop him, though heavy steps were coming quite close to us.

"Sh! Sh!" muttered I, "if you go on like that they'll certainly find us, and then we shall have managed all this for nothing, and might as well have gone back with old Rowe."

"Which, wind and weather permitting, young gentlemen, you will," said a voice just above us, though we did not hear it.

"I wish we could," sobbed Fred, "only there's no money now. But I'm going to get out of this beastly hole any way."

"You're a nice fellow to tell me about your grandfather," said I, in desperate exasperation; "I don't believe you've the pluck for a common sailor, let alone a Great Discoverer."

"You've hit the right nail on the head there, Master Charles," said the voice.

"Fiddlesticks about my grandfather!" said Fred.

In the practical experiences of the last three days my faith in Fred's tales had more than once been rather rudely shaken; but the contemptuous tone in which he disposed of our model, the Great Sea Captain, startled me so severely that I do

not think I felt any additional shock of astonishment when strong hands lifted the tarpaulin from our heads, and—grave amid several grinning faces—we saw the barge-master.

How he reproached us, and how Fred begged him to take us home, and how I besought him to let us go to sea, it would be tedious to relate. I have no doubt now that he never swerved from his intention of taking us back, but he preferred to do it by fair means if possible. So he fubbed me off, and took us round the docks to amuse us, and talked of dinner in a way that went to Fred's heart.

But when I found that we were approaching the gates once more, I stopped dead short. As we went about the docks I had replied to the barge-master's remarks as well as I could, but I had never ceased thinking of the desire of my heart, and I resolved to make one passionate appeal to his pity.

"Mr. Rowe," I said, in a choking voice, "please don't take me home! I would give anything in the world to go to sea. Why shouldn't I be a sailor when I want to? Take Fred home if he wants to go, and tell them that I'm all right, and mean to do my duty and come back a credit to them."

Mr. Rowe's face was inscrutable, and I pleaded harder.

"You're an old navy man, you know, Rowe," I said, "and if you recommended me to the captain of one of these ships for a cabin-boy, I'll be bound they'd take me."

"Mr. Charles," said the old man earnestly, "you couldn't go for a cabin-boy, you don't know——"

"You think I can't rough it," I interrupted impatiently, "but try me, and see. I know what I'm after," I added, consequentially; "and I'll bear what I have to bear, and do what I'm set to do if I can

get afloat. I'll be a captain some day, and give orders instead of taking them."

Mr. Rowe drew up to attention and took off his hat. "And wanting an able-bodied seaman in them circumstances, sir, for any voyage you likes to make," said he emphatically, "call for Samuel Rowe." He then wiped the passing enthusiasm from the crown of his head with his handkerchief, and continued—with the judicious diplomacy for which he was remarkable—"But of course, sir, it's the Royal Navy you'll begin in, as a midshipman. It's seaman-ship *you* wants to learn, not swabbing decks or emptying buckets below whilst others is aloft. Your father's son would be a good deal out of place, sir, as cabin-boy in a common trading vessel."

Mr. Rowe's speech made an impression, and I think he saw that it did.

"Look here, Master Charles," said he, "you've a gentleman's feelings: come home now, and bear me out with your widowed mother and your only sister, sir, and with Master Fred's father, that I'm in duty bound to, and promised to deliver safe and sound as return cargo, wind and weather permitting."

"Oh, come home! come home!" reiterated Fred.

I stood speechless for a minute or two. All around and above me rose the splendid masts, trellised with the rigging that I longed to climb. The refreshing scent of tar mingled with the smells of the various cargoes. The coming and going of men who came and went to and fro the ends of the earth stirred all my pulses to restlessness. And above the noises of their coming and going I heard the lapping of the water of the incoming tide against the dock, which spoke with a voice more powerful than that of Mr. Rowe.

And yet I went with him.

It was not because the canvas bag was empty, not because Fred would not stay

with me (for I had begun to think that the captain's grandson was not destined to be the hero of exploits on the ocean), but when Mr. Rowe spoke of my widowed mother and of Henrietta, he touched a sore point on my conscience. I had had an uneasy feeling from the first that there was something rather mean in my desertion of them. Pride, and I hope some less selfish impulse, made me feel that I could never be quite happy—even on the main-mast top—if I knew that I had behaved ill to them.

I could not very well speak, but I turned round and began to walk in the direction of the dock-gates. Mr. Rowe behaved uncommonly kindly. He said nothing more, but turned as if I had given the word of command, and walked respectfully just behind me. I resolved not to look back, and I did not. I was quite determined too about one thing; Mr. Rowe should never be able to say he had seen me make a fool of myself after I had made up my mind. But in reality I had very hard work to keep from beginning to cry, just when Fred was beginning to leave off.

I screwed up my eyes and kept them dry, however, but as we went through the gate there came in a sailor with a little bundle like ours, and a ship's name on his hat. His hat sat as if a gale were just taking it off, and his sea-blue shirt was blown open by breezes that my back was turned upon. In spite of all I could do one tear got through my eyelashes and ran down, and I caught it on my lips.

It was a very bitter tear, and as salt as the salt, salt sea!



CHAPTER XIV.

A GLOW ON THE HORIZON—A FANTASTIC PEAL—WHAT I SAW WHEN THE ROOF FELL IN.

IT was the second day of our return voyage. Mr. Rowe had been very kind, and especially so to me. He had told us tales of seafaring life, but they related exclusively to the Royal Navy, and not unfrequently bore with disparagement on the mercantile marine.

Nowhere, perhaps, are grades of rank more strongly marked with professional discipline and personal independence better combined than in the army and navy. But the gulf implied by Mr. Rowe between the youngest midshipman and the highest seaman who was not an officer was, I think, in excess of the fact. As to becoming cabin-boy to a trading vessel in hopes of rising to be a captain, the barge-master contrived to impress me with the idea that I might as well take the situation of boot and knife cleaner in the Royal Kitchen, in hopes of its proving the first step towards ascending the Throne.

We seemed to have seen and done so much since we were on the canal before, that I felt quite sentimental as we glided into Linnet Flash.

"The old place looks just the same, Barge-master," said I with a travelled air.

"So it do, sir," said Mr. Rowe; and he added—"There's no place like Home."

I hardly know how near we were to the town, but I know that it was getting late, that the dew was heavy on the towing-path, and that among the dark pencilled shadows of the salallows in the water the full moon's reflection lay like a golden

shield; when the driver, who was ahead, stepped back and shouted—"The bells are ringing!"

When we got a little nearer we heard them quite clearly, and just when I was observing a red glow diffuse itself in the cold night sky above the willow hedge on our left, Mr. Rowe said, "There must be a queer kind of echo somewhere, I heard sixteen bells."

And then I saw the driver, whose figure stood out dark against the moonlit moorland on our right, point with his arm to the fast crimsoning sky, and Mr. Rowe left the rudder and came forward, and Fred, who had had his head low down listening, ran towards us from the bows and cried:

"There *are* sixteen, and they're ringing backwards—*it's a fire!*"

The driver mounted the horse, which was put to the trot, and we hurried on. The bells came nearer and nearer with their fantastic clanging, and the sky grew more lurid as they rang. Then there was a bend in the canal, and we caught sight of the two towers of S. Philip and S. James, dark against the glow.

"The whole town is in flames!" cried Fred.

"Not it," said the barge-master; "it's ten to one nothing but a rubbish-heap burning, or the moors on fire beyond the town."

Mr. Rowe rather snubbed Fred, but I think he was curious about the matter. The driver urged his horse, and the good barge *Betsy* swung along at a pace to which she was little accustomed.

When we came by the cricket-field Mr. Rowe himself said—"It's in the middle of the town."

Through the deafening noise of the bells I contrived to shout in his ear a request that I might be put ashore, as we were now about on a level with my home.

Mr. Rowe ran a plank quickly out and landed me, without time for adieux.

I hastened up to the town. The first street I got into was empty, but it seemed to vibrate to S. Philip's peal. And after that I pushed my way through people, hurrying as I was hurrying, and the nearer I got to home the thicker grew the crowd and the ruddier became the glow. And now, in spite of the bells, I caught other noises. The roar of irresistible fire,—which has a strange likeness to the roar of irresistible water,—the loud crackling of the burning wood, and the moving and talking of the crowd, which was so dense that I could hardly get forward.

I contrived to squeeze myself along, however, and as I turned into our street I felt the warmth of the fire, and when I looked at my old home it was a mass of flames.

I tried to get people to make way for me by saying—"It's my house, please let me through!" But nobody seemed to hear me. And yet there was a pause, which was only filled by that curious sound when a crowd of people gasp or sigh; and if every man had been a rock it could not have been more impossible to move backwards or forwards. It was dark, except for the moonlight, where I stood, but in a moment or two the flames burst from the bedroom windows, and the red light spread farther, and began to light up faces near me. I was just about to appeal to a man I knew, when a roar began which I knew was not that of the fire. It was the roar of human voices. And when it swelled louder, and was caught up as it came along, and then broke into deafening cheers, I was so wild with excitement and anxiety that I began to kick the legs of the man in front of me to make him let me go to the home that was burning before my eyes.

What he would have done in return, I

don't know, but at this moment the crowd broke up, and we were pushed, and pressed, and jostled about, and people kept calling to "Make way!" and after tumbling down, and being picked up twice, I found myself in the front row of a kind of lane that had been made through the crowd, down which several men were coming, carrying on their shoulders an arm-chair with people in it.

As they passed me there was a crash, which seemed to shake the street. The roof of our house had fallen in!

As it fell the flames burst upon every side and in the sudden glare the street became as bright as day, and every little thing about one seemed to spring into sight. Half the crowd was known to me in a moment.

Then I looked at the chair which was being carried along; and by a large chip on one of the legs I knew it was my father's old arm-chair.

And in the chair I saw Rupert in his shirt and trousers, and Henrietta in a petticoat and an out-door jacket, with so white a face that even the firelight seemed to give it no colour, and on her lap was Baby Cecil in his night-gown, with black smut marks on his nose and chin.



CHAPTER XV.

HENRIETTA'S DIARY—A GREAT EMERGENCY.

RUPERT never was a fellow who could give descriptions of things, and Henrietta was ill for some time after the fire, and Mr. Bustard said she wasn't to talk about it.

But she knew I wanted to know, so one day when she was downstairs with me in

the "Miniature Room" (it was at the Castle) she gave me a manuscript book, and said, "It's my diary, Charlie, so I know you won't look. But I've put in two marks for the beginning and end of the bit about the fire. I wrote it that evening, you know, before Mr. Bustard came, and my head got so bad."

Of course I made her show me exactly where to begin and leave off, and then I read it. This was it.

"It had been a very hot day, and I had got rather a headache and gone to bed. The pain kept me awake a good bit, and when I did get to sleep I think I slept rather lightly. I was partly awakened by noises which seemed to have been going in my head all night till I could bear them no longer, so I woke up, and found that people were shouting outside, and that there was a dreadful smell of burning. I had got on my flannel petticoat when Rupert called me and said, 'Henny dear, the house is on fire! Just put something round you, and come quickly.'

"Just outside the door we met Cook; she said, 'The Lord be thanked! it's you, Miss Henrietta. Come along!'

"Rupert said, 'Where's Mother, Cook?'

"Missus was took with dreadful fainting fits,' she replied, 'and they've got her over to the Crown. We're all to go there, and everything that can be saved.'

"Where's Baby,' said I, 'and Jane?'

"With your Ma, miss, I expect,' Cook said; and as we came out she asked some one, who said, 'I saw Jane at the door of the Crown just now.' I had been half asleep till then, but when we got into the street and saw the smoke coming out of the dining-room window, Rupert and I wanted to stay and try to save something, but one of the men who was there said, 'You and your brother's not strong enough to be of no great use, miss; you're only in the way of the engine. Everybody's doing their best to save your things, and if you'll go to the

Crown to your mamma, you'll do the best that could be.'

"The people who were saving our things saved them all alike. They threw them out of the window, and as I had seen the big blue china jar smashed to shivers, I felt a longing to go and show them what to do; but Rupert said, 'The fellow's quite right, Henny,' and he seized me by the hand and dragged me off to the Crown. Jane was in the hall, looking quite wild, and she said to us, 'Where's Master Cecil?' I didn't stop to ask her how it was that she didn't know. I ran out again, and Rupert came after me. I suppose we both looked up at the nursery window when we came near, and there was Baby Cecil standing and screaming for help. Before we got to the door other people had seen him, and two or three men pushed into the house. They came out gasping and puffing without Cecil, and I heard one man say, 'It's too far gone. It wouldn't bear a child's weight, and if you got up you'd never come down again.'

"God help the poor child!' said the other man, who was the chemist, and had a large family, I know. I looked round and saw by Rupert's face that he had heard. It was like a stone. I don't know how it was, but it seemed to come into my head: 'If Baby Cecil is burnt it will kill Rupert too.' And I began to think; and I thought of the back stairs. There was a pocket-handkerchief in my jacket pocket, and I soaked it in the water on the ground. The town burgesses wouldn't buy a new hose when we got the new steam fire-engine, and when they used the old one it burst in five places, so that everything was swimming, for the water was laid on from the canal. I think my idea must have been written on my face, for though I didn't speak, Rupert seemed to guess at once, and he ran after me, crying, 'Let me go, Henrietta!' but I pretended not to hear.

"When we got to the back of the house the fire was not nearly so bad, and we got

in. But though it wasn't exactly on fire where we were, the smoke came rolling down the passage from the front of the house, and by the time we got to the back stairs we could not see or breathe, in spite of wet cloths over our faces, and our eyes smarted with the smoke. 'Go down on all fours, Henny,' said Rupert. So I did. It was wonderful. When I got down with my face close to the ground there was a bit of quite fresh air, and above this the smoke rolled like a cloud. I could see the castors of the legs of a table in the hall, but no higher up. In this way we saw the foot of the back stairs, and climbed up them on our hands and knees. But in spite of the bit of fresh air near the ground the smoke certainly grew thicker, and it got hotter and hotter, and we could hear the roaring of the flames coming nearer, and the clanging of the bells outside, and I never knew what it was to feel thirst before then! When we were up the first flight, and the smoke was suffocating, I heard Rupert say, 'Oh, Henny, you good girl, shall we ever get down again?' I couldn't speak, my throat was so sore, but I remember thinking, 'It's like going up through the clouds into heaven; and we shall find Baby Cecil there.' But after that it got rather clearer, because the fire was in the lower part of the house then, and when we got to the top we stood up, and found our way to the nursery by hearing Baby Cecil scream.

"The great difficulty was to get him down, for we couldn't carry him and keep close to the ground. So I said, 'You go first on your hands and knees backwards, and tell him to do as you do, and I'll come last, so that he may see me doing the same and imitate me.' Baby was very good about it, and when the heat worried him and he stopped, Rupert said, 'Come on, Baby, or Henny will run over you,' and he scrambled down as good as gold.

"And when we got to the door the people

began to shout and to cheer, and I thought they would have torn Baby to bits. It made me very giddy, and so did the clanging of those dreadful bells; and then I noticed that Rupert was limping, and I said, 'Oh, Rupert, have you hurt your knee?' and he said, 'It's nothing, come to the Crown.' But there were two of the young men from Jones's shop there, and they said, 'Don't you walk and hurt your knee, sir; we'll take you.' And they pushed up my father's arm-chair, which had been saved and was outside, and Rupert sat down, I believe, because he could not stand. Then they said, 'There's room for you, miss,' and Rupert told me to come, and I took Baby on my lap; but I felt so ill I thought I should certainly fall out when they lifted us up.

"The way the people cheered made me very giddy; I think I shall always feel sick when I hear hurraing now.

"Rupert is very good if you're ill. He looked at me and said, 'You're the bravest girl I ever knew, but don't faint if you can help it, or Baby will fall out.'

"I didn't; and I wouldn't have fainted when we got to the Crown if I could have stopped myself by anything I could do."

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. ROWE ON THE SUBJECT—OUR COUSIN
—WESTON GETS INTO PRINT—THE
HARBOUR'S MOUTH—WHAT LIES BE-
YOND.

MR. ROWE's anxiety to see Rupert and Henrietta, and to "take the liberty of expressing himself" about their having saved Baby Cecil's life was very great, but the interview did not take place for some time. The barge *Betsy* took two voyages to Nine Elms and home again before

Henrietta was downstairs and allowed to talk about the fire.

Rupert refused to see the barge-master when he called to ask after Henrietta; he was vexed because people made a fuss about the affair, and when Rupert was vexed he was not gracious. When Henrietta got better, however, she said, "We ought to see old Rowe and thank him for his kindness to Charlie;" so the next time he called, we all went into the housekeeper's room to see him.

He was very much pleased and excited, which always seemed to make him inclined to preach. He set forth the noble motives which must have moved Rupert and Henrietta to their heroic conduct in the emergency, so that I felt more proud of them than ever. But Rupert frowned, and said, "Nonsense, Rowe, I'm sure I never thought anything of the kind. I don't believe we either of us thought anything at all."

But Mr. Rowe had not served seventeen years in the Royal Navy to be put down when he expounded a point of valour.

"That's where it is, Master Rupert," said he. "It wouldn't have been you or Miss Henrietta either if you had. 'A man overboard,' says you—that's enough for one of your family, sir. *They* never stops to think 'Can I swim?' but in you goes, up the stairs that wouldn't hold the weight of a new-born babby, and right through the raging flames."

"Oh, dear!" cried Henrietta, "that's just what Cook and all kinds of people will say. But it was the front stairs that were on fire. We only went up the back stairs, and they weren't burning at all."

The barge-master smiled in reply. But it was with the affability of superior knowledge, and I feel quite sure that he always told the story (and believed it) according to this impossible version.

It was on the third day after the fire that our cousin called at the *Crown*. He had never been to see us before, and, as I have said, we had never been to the Castle. But the next day he sent a close carriage for Henrietta and my mother, and a dog-cart for Rupert and me, and brought us up to the Castle. We were there for three months.

It was through him that Rupert went to those baths abroad, which cured his knee completely. And then, because my mother could not afford to do it, he sent him to a grander public school than Dr. Jessop's old grammar school, and Mr. Johnson sent Thomas Johnson there too, for Tom could not bear to be parted from Rupert, and his father never refused him anything.

But what I think was so very kind of our cousin was his helping me. Rupert and Henrietta had been a credit to the family, but I deserved nothing. I had only run away in the mean hope of outshining them, and had made a fool of myself, whilst they had been really great in doing their duty at home. However, he did back me up with mother about going to sea, and got me on board the training-ship *Albion*; and my highest hope is to have the chance of bringing my share of renown to my father's name, that his cousin may never regret having helped me to my heart's desire.

Fred Johnson and I are very good friends, but since our barge voyage we have never been quite so intimate. I think the strongest tie between us was his splendid stories of the captain, and I do not believe in them now.

Oddly enough, my chief friend—of the whole lot—is Weston. Rupert always said I had a vulgar taste in the choice of friends, so it seems curious that of our old schoolmates Johnson should be his friend and Weston mine. For Johnson's father

is only a canal-carrier, and Weston is a fellow of good family.

He is so very clever! And I have such a habit of turning my pockets inside out for everybody to see, that I admire his reticence; and then, though he is so ironical with himself, as well as other people, he has very fine ideas and ambitions and very noble and upright principles—when you know him well.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," and the fire that burned down our house got Weston into print at last.

It was not a common letter either, in the "correspondence" part, with small type, and the editor not responsible. It was a leading article, printed big, and it was about the fire and Rupert and Henrietta. Thomas Johnson read it to us, and we did not know who wrote it; but it was true, and in good taste. After the account of the fire came a quotation from Horace:

"Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis."

And Johnson cried—"That's Weston, depend upon it. He's in the *Weekly Spectator* at last!"

And then, to my utter amazement, came such a chronicle of the valiant deeds of Rupert's ancestors as Weston could only have got from one source. What had furnished his ready pen with matter for a comic ballad to punish my bragging had filled it also to do honour to Rupert and Henrietta's real bravery, and down to what the colonel of my father's regiment had said of him—it was all there.

Weston came to see me the other day at Dartmouth, where our training-ship *Albion* lies, and he was so charmed by the old town with its carved and gabled houses, and its luxuriant gardens rich with pale-blossomed laurels, which no frost

dwarfs, and crimson fuchsias gnarled with age, and its hill-embosomed harbour, where the people of all grades and ages, and of both sexes, flit hither and thither in their boats as landlubbers would take an evening stroll—that I felt somewhat justified in the romantic love I have for the place.

And when we lay in one of the *Albion's* boats, rocking up and down in that soothing swell which freshens the harbour's mouth, Weston made me tell him all about the lion and the silver chain, and he called me a prig for saying so often that I did not believe in it now. I remember he said, "In this sleepy, damp, delightful Dartmouth, who but a prig could deny the truth of a poetical dream?"

He declared he could see the lion in a cave in the rock, and that the poor beast wanted a new sea-green ribbon.

Weston speaks so much more cleverly than I can, that I could not explain to him then that I am still but too apt to dream! But the harbour's mouth is now only the beginning of my visions, which stretch far over the sea beyond, and over the darker line of that horizon where the ships come and go.

I hope it is not wrong to dream. My father was so modest as well as ambitious, so good as well as so gallant, that I would rather die than disgrace him by empty conceit and unprofitable hopes.

Weston is a very religious fellow, though he does not "cant" at all. When I was going away to Dartmouth, and he saw me off (for we were great friends), one of the last things he said to me was, "I say, don't leave off saying your prayers, you know."

I haven't, and I told him so this last time. I often pray that if ever I am great I may be good too; and sometimes I pray that if I try hard to be good God will let me be great as well.

The most wonderful thing was old Rowe's taking a cheap ticket and coming down to see me last summer. I never can regret my voyage with him in the *Betsy*, for I did thoroughly enjoy it, though I

often think how odd it is that in my vain, jealous wild-goose chase after adventures I missed the chance of distinguishing myself in the only Great Emergency which has yet occurred in our family.

A VERY ILL-TEMPERED FAMILY.

"Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is HE sure to bless?"

Hymn of the Eastern Church.

A VERY ILL-TEMPERED FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY FAILING.

WE are a very ill-tempered family.

I want to say it, and not to unsay it by any explanations, because I think it is good for us to face the fact in the unadorned form in which it probably presents itself to the minds of our friends.

Amongst ourselves we have always admitted it by pieces, as it were, or in negative propositions. We allow that we are firm of disposition ; we know that we are straightforward ; we show what we feel. We have opinions and principles of our own ; we are not so thick-skinned as some good people, nor as cold-blooded as others.

When two of us quarrelled (and Nurse used to say that no two of us ever agreed), the provocation always seemed, to each of us, great enough amply to excuse the passion. But I have reason to think that people seldom exclaimed, "What grievances those poor children are exasperated with !" but that they often said, "What terrible tempers they all have !"

There are five of us : Philip and I are the eldest ; we are twins. My name is Isobel, and I never allow it to be shortened into the ugly word *Bella*, nor into the still more hideous word *Izzy*, by either the servants or the children. My aunt Isobel never would, and neither will I.

"The children" are the other three. They are a good deal younger than Philip and I, so we have always kept them in order. I do not mean that we taught them to behave wonderfully well, but I mean that we made them give way to us elder ones. Among themselves they squabbled dreadfully.

We are a very ill-tempered family.

CHAPTER II.

ILL-TEMPERED PEOPLE AND THEIR FRIENDS — NARROW ESCAPES — THE HATCHET- QUARREL.

I DO not wish for a moment to defend ill-temper, but I do think that people who suffer from ill-tempered people often talk as if they were the only ones who do suffer in the matter ; and as if the ill-tempered people themselves quite enjoyed being in a rage.

And yet how much misery is endured by those who have never got the victory over their own ill-temper ! To feel wretched and exasperated by little annoyances which good-humoured people get over with a shrug or a smile ; to have things rankle in my mind like a splinter in the flesh, which glide lightly off yours, and leave no mark ; to be unable to bear a joke, knowing that

one is doubly laughed at because one can't; to have this deadly sore at heart—"I *cannot* forgive; I *cannot* forget," there is no pleasure in these things. The tears of sorrow are not more bitter than the tears of anger, of hurt pride or thwarted will. As to the fit of passion in which one is giddy, blind, and deaf, if there is a relief to the overcharged mind in saying the sharpest things and hitting the heaviest blows one can at the moment, the pleasantness is less than momentary, for almost as we strike we foresee the pains of regret and of humbling ourselves to beg pardon which must ensue. Our friends do not always pity as well as blame us, though they are sorry for those who were possessed by devils long ago.

Good-tempered people, too, who I fancy would find it quite easy not to be provoking, and to be a little patient and forbearing, really seem sometimes to irritate hot-tempered ones on purpose, as if they thought it was good for them to get used to it.

I do not mean that I think ill-tempered people should be constantly yielded to, as Nurse says Mrs. Rampant and the servants have given way to Mr. Rampant till he has got to be quite as unreasonable and nearly as dangerous as most maniacs, and his friends never cross him, for the same reason that they would not stir up a mad bull.

Perhaps I do not quite know how I would have our friends treat us who are cursed with bad tempers. I think to avoid unnecessary provocation, and to be patient with us in the height of our passion, is wise as well as kind. But no principle should be conceded to us, and rights that we have unjustly attacked should be faithfully defended when we are calm enough to listen. I fancy that where gentle Mrs. Rampant is wrong is that she allows Mr. Rampant to think that what really are

concessions to his weakness are concessions to his wisdom. And what is not founded on truth cannot do lasting good. And if, years ago, before he became a sort of gunpowder cask at large, he had been asked if he wished Mrs. Rampant to persuade herself, and Mrs. Rampant, the little Rampants, and the servants to combine to persuade him, that he was right when he was wrong, and wise when he was foolish, and reasonable when he was unjust, I think he would have said No. I do not believe one could deliberately desire to be befooled by one's family for all the best years of one's life. And yet how many people are!

I do not think I am ever likely to be so loved and feared by those I live with as to have my ill-humours made into laws. I hope not. But I am sometimes thankful, on the other hand, that God is more forbearing with us than we commonly are with each other, and does not lead us into temptation when we are at our worst and weakest.

Anyone who has a bad temper must sometimes look back at the years before he learned self-control, and feel thankful that he is not a murderer, or burdened for life by the weight on his conscience of some calamity of which he was the cause. If the knife which furious Fred threw at his sister before he was out of petticoats had hit the child's eye instead of her forehead, could he ever have looked into the blinded face without a pang? If the blow with which impatient Annie flattered herself she was correcting her younger brother had thrown the naughty little lad out of the boat instead of into the sailor's arms, and he had been drowned—at ten years old a murderess, how could she endure for life the weight of her unavailing remorse?

I very nearly killed Philip once. It makes me shudder to think of it, and I

often wonder I ever could lose my temper again.

We were eight years old, and out in the garden together. We had settled to build a moss-house for my dolls, and had borrowed the hatchet out of the wood-house, without leave, to chop the stakes with. It was entirely my idea, and I had collected all the moss and most of the sticks. It was I, too, who had taken the hatchet. Philip had been very tiresome about not helping me in the hard part; but when I had driven in the sticks by leaning on them with all my weight, and had put in bits of brushwood where the moss fell out and Philip laughed at me, and, in short, when the moss-house was beginning to look quite real, Philip was very anxious to work at it, and wanted the hatchet.

"You wouldn't help me over the hard work," said I, "so I shan't give it you now; I'll make my moss-house myself."

"No, you won't," said Philip.

"Yes, I shall," said I.

"No, you won't," he reiterated; "for I shall pull it down as fast as you build it."

"You'd better not," I threatened.

Just then we were called in to dinner. I hid the hatchet, and Philip said no more; but he got out before me, and when I returned to work I found that the moss-house walls, which had cost me so much labour, were pulled to pieces and scattered about the shrubbery. Philip was not to be seen.

My heart had been so set upon my project that at first I could only feel the overwhelming disappointment. I was not a child who often cried, but I burst into tears.

I was sobbing my hardest when Philip sprang upon me in triumph, and laughing at my distress.

"I kept my promise," said he, tossing his head, "and I'll go on doing it."

I am sure those shocks of fury which

seize one like a fit must be a devil possessing one. In an instant my eyes were as dry as the desert in a hot wind, and my head reeling with passion. I ran to the hatchet, and came back brandishing it.

"If you touch one stake or bit of moss of mine again," said I, "I'll throw my hatchet at your head. I can keep promises too."

My intention was only to frighten him. I relied on his not daring to brave such a threat; unhappily he relied on my not daring to carry it out. He took up some of my moss and threw it at me by way of reply.

I flung the hatchet!—

My Aunt Isobel has a splendid figure, with such grace and power as one might expect from her strong health and ready mind. I had not seen her at the moment, for I was blind with passion, nor had Philip, for his back was turned towards her. I did not see distinctly how she watched, as one watches for a ball, and caught the hatchet within a yard of Philip's head.

My Aunt Isobel has a temper much like the temper of the rest of the family. When she had caught it in her left hand she turned round and boxed my ears with her right hand till I could see less than ever. (I believe she suffered for that outburst for months afterwards. She was afraid she had damaged my hearing, as that sense is too often damaged or destroyed by the blows of ill-tempered parents, teachers, and nurses.)

Then she turned back and shook Philip as vigorously as she had boxed me. "I saw you, you spiteful, malicious boy!" said my Aunt Isobel.

All the time she was shaking him, Philip was looking at her feet. Something that he saw absorbed his attention so fully that he forgot to cry.

"You're bleeding, Aunt Isobel," said

he, when she gave him breath enough to speak.

The truth was this: the nervous force which Aunt Isobel had summoned up to catch the hatchet seemed to cease when it was caught; her arm fell powerless, and the hatchet cut her ankle. That left arm was useless for many months afterwards, to my abiding reproach.

Philip was not hurt, but he might have been killed. Everybody told me so often that it was a warning to me to correct my terrible temper, that I might have revolted against the reiteration if the facts had been less grave. But I never can feel lightly about that hatchet-quarrel. It opened a gulf of possible wickedness and life-long misery, over the brink of which my temper would have dragged me, but for Aunt Isobel's strong arm and keen eye, and over which it might succeed in dragging me any day, unless I could cure myself of my besetting sin.

I never denied it. It was a warning.

CHAPTER III.

WARNINGS—MY AUNT ISOBEL—MR. RAMPANT'S TEMPER, AND HIS CONSCIENCE.

I WAS not the only scarecrow held up before my own mind.

Nurse had a gallery of historical characters, whom she kept as beacons to warn our stormy passions of their fate. The hot-tempered boy who killed his brother when they were at school; the hot-tempered farmer who took his gun to frighten a trespasser, and ended by shooting him; the young lady who destroyed the priceless porcelain in a pet; the hasty young gentleman who kicked his favourite dog

and broke its ribs;—they were all warnings: so was old Mr. Rampant, so was my Aunt Isobel.

Aunt Isobel's story was a whispered tradition of the nursery for many years before she and I were so intimate, in consequence of her goodness and kindness to me, that one day I was bold enough to say to her, "Aunt Isobel, is it true that the reason why you never married is because you and he quarrelled, and you were very angry, and he went away, and he was drowned at sea?"

Child as I was, I do not think I should have been so indelicate as to have asked this question if I had not come to fancy that Nurse made out the story worse than it really was, for my behoof. Aunt Isobel was so cheerful and bright with us!—and I was not at that time able to believe that anyone could mend a broken heart with other people's interests so that the marks should show so little!

My aunt had a very clear skin, but in an instant her face was thick with a heavy blush, and she was silent. I marvelled that these were the only signs of displeasure she allowed herself to betray, for the question was no sooner out of my mouth than I wished it unsaid, and felt how furious she must naturally feel to hear that her sad and sacred story was bandied between servants and children as a nursery-tale with a moral to it.

But oh, Aunt Isobel! Aunt Isobel! you had at this time progressed far along that hard but glorious road of self-conquest which I had hardly found my way to.

"I beg your pardon," I began, before she spoke.

"You ought to," said my aunt—she never spoke less than decisively—"I thought you had more tact, Isobel, than to tell anyone what servants have said of one's sins or sorrows behind one's back."

"I am *very* sorry," I repeated with

shame; "but the thing is, I didn't believe it was true, you always seem so happy. I am *very* sorry."

"It is true," said Aunt Isobel. "Child, whilst we are speaking of it—for the first and the last time—let it be a warning for you to illustrate a very homely proverb: 'Don't cut off your nose to spite your own face.' Ill-tempered people are always doing it, and I did it to my life-long loss. I was angry with him, and like Jonah I said to myself, 'I do well to be angry.' And though I would die twenty deaths harder than the death he died to see his face for five minutes and be forgiven, I am not weak enough to warp my judgment with my misery. I was in the right, and he was in the wrong. But I forgot how much harder a position it is to be in the wrong than in the right in a quarrel. I did not think of how, instead of making the return path difficult to those who err, we ought to make it easy, as God does for us. I gave him no chance of unsaying with grace or credit what he could not fail to regret that he had said. Isobel, you have a clear head and a sharp tongue, as I have. You will understand when I say that I had the satisfaction of proving that I was in the right and he was in the wrong, and that I was firmly, conscientiously determined to make no concessions, no half-way advances, though our Father goes to meet His prodigals. Merciful Heaven! I had the satisfaction of parting myself for all these slow years from the most honest—the tenderest-hearted—"

My Aunt Isobel had overrated her strength. After a short and vain struggle in silence she got up and went slowly out of the room, resting her hand for an instant on my little knick-knack table by the door as she went out—the only time I ever saw her lean upon anything.

* * * * *

Old Mr. Rampant was another of my

"warnings." He—to whose face no one dared hint that he could ever be in the wrong—would have been more astonished than Aunt Isobel to learn how plainly—nay, how contemptuously—the servants spoke behind his back of his unbridled temper and its results. They knew that the only son was somewhere on the other side of the world, and that little Mrs. Rampant wept tears for him and sent money to him in secret, and they had no difficulty in deciding why: "He'd got his father's temper, and it stood to reason that he and the old gentleman couldn't put up their horses together." The moral was not obscure. From no lack of affection, but for want of self-control, the son was condemned to homelessness and hardships in his youth, and the father was sonless in his old age.

But that was not the point of Nurse's tales about Mr. Rampant which impressed me most, not even the endless anecdotes of his unreasonable passions which leaked out at his back-door and came up our back-stairs to the nursery. They rather amused us. That assault on the butcher's boy, who brought ribs of beef instead of sirloin, for which he was summoned and fined; his throwing the dinner out of the window, and going to dine at the village inn—by which the dogs ate the dinner and he had to pay for two dinners, and to buy new plates and dishes.

We laughed at these things, but in my serious moments, especially on the first Sunday of the month, I was haunted by something else which Nurse had told me about old Mr. Rampant.

In our small parish—a dull village on the edge of a marsh—the Holy Communion was only celebrated once a month. It was not because he was irreligious that old Mr. Rampant was one of the too numerous non-communicants. "It's his temper, poor gentleman," said Nurse. "He

can't answer for himself, and he has that religious feeling he wouldn't like to come unless he was fit. The housekeeper overheard Mrs. Rampant a-begging of him last Christmas. It was no listening either, for he bellowed at her like a bull, and swore dreadful that whatever else he was he wouldn't be profane."

"Couldn't he keep his temper for a week, don't you think?" said I sadly, thinking of my mother's old copy of the "Week's Preparation" for the Lord's Supper.

"It would be as bad if he got into one of his tantrums directly afterwards," said Nurse; "and with people pestering for Christmas-boxes, and the pudding and turkey, and so many things that might go wrong, it would be as likely as not he would. It's a sad thing too," she added, "for his neck's terribly short, and they say all his family have gone suddenly with the apoplexy. It's an awful thing, Miss Isobel, to be taken sudden—and unprepared."

The awe of it came back on me every month when the fair white linen covered the rustiness of the old velvet altar-cloth which the marsh damps were rotting, and the silver vessels shone, and the village organist played out the non-communicants with a somewhat inappropriate triumphal march, and little Mrs. Rampant knelt on with buried face as we went out, and Mr. Rampant came out with us, looking more glum than usual, and with such a short neck!

Now I think poor Mr. Rampant was wrong, and that he ought to have gone with Mrs. Rampant to the Lord's Supper that Christmas. He might have found grace to have got through all the little ups and downs and domestic disturbances of a holiday season without being very ferocious; and if he had tried and failed I think God would have forgiven him.

And he might—it is possible that he *might*—during that calm and solemn Communion, have forgiven his son as he felt that Our Father forgave him. So Aunt Isobel says; and I have good reason to think that she is likely to be right.

I think so too *now*, but *then* I was simply impressed by the thought that an ill-tempered person was, as Nurse expressed it, "unfit" to join in the highest religious worship. It is true that I was also impressed by her other saying, "It's an awful thing, Miss Isobel, to be taken sudden and unprepared;" but there was a temporary compromise in my own case. I could not be a communicant till I was confirmed.

CHAPTER IV.

CASES OF CONSCIENCE—ETHICS OF ILL-TEMPER.

CONFIRMATIONS were not very frequent in our little village at this time. About once in three years the Bishop came to us. He came when I was twelve years old. Opinions were divided as to whether I was old enough, but I decided the matter by saying I would rather wait till the next opportunity.

"I may be more fit by that time," was my thought, and it was probably not unlike some of Mr. Rampant's self-communings.

The time came, and the Bishop also; I was fifteen.

I do not know why, but nobody had proposed that Philip should be confirmed at twelve years old. Fifteen was thought to be quite early enough for him, and so it came about that we were confirmed together.

I am very thankful that, as it happened, I had Aunt Isobel to talk to.

"You're relieved from one perplexity at any rate," said she, when I had been speaking of that family failing which was also mine. "You know your weak point. I remember a long talk I had, years ago, with Mrs. Rampant, whom I used to know very well when we were young. She said one of her great difficulties was not being able to find out her besetting sin. She said it always made her so miserable when clergymen preached on that subject, and said that every enlightened Christian must have discovered one master passion amongst the others in his soul. She had tried so hard, and could only find a lot, none much bigger or much less than the others. Some vanity, some selfishness, some distrust and weariness, some peevishness, some indolence, and a lapful of omissions. Since she married," continued my aunt, slowly pulling her thick black eyelashes, after a fashion she had, "I believe she has found the long-lost failing. It is impatience with Mr. Rampant, she thinks."

I could not help laughing.

"However, Isobel, we may be sure of this, people of soft, gentle temperaments have their own difficulties with their own souls which we escape. Perhaps in the absence of such marked vices as bring one to open shame one might be slower to undertake vigorous self-improvement. You and I have no difficulty in seeing the sin lying at *our* door."

"N—no," said I.

"Well, *have you?*" said Aunt Isobel, facing round. "Bless me," she added impetuously, "don't say you haven't if you have. Never let anyone else think for you, child!"

"If you'll only have patience and let me explain——"

"I'm patience its very self!" interrupted

my aunt, "but I do hate a No that means Yes."

My patience began to evaporate.

"There are some things, Aunt Isobel, *you know*, which can't be exactly squeezed into No and Yes. But if you don't want to be bothered I won't say anything, or I'll say yes or no, whichever you like."

And I kicked the shovel. (My aunt had shoved the poker with *her* slipper.) She drew her foot back and spoke very gently:

"I beg your pardon, my dear. Please say what you were going to say, and in your own way."

There is no doubt that good-humour—like bad—is infectious. I drew nearer to Aunt Isobel, and fingered the sleeve of her dress caressingly.

"You know, dear Aunt Isobel, that I should never think of saying to the Rector what I want to say to you. And I don't mean that I don't agree to whatever he tells us about right and wrong, but still I think if one can be quite convinced in the depths of one's own head, too, it's a good thing, as well as knowing that he must be right."

"Certainly," said Aunt Isobel.

"To begin with, I don't want you to think me any better than I am. When we were very very little, Philip and I used to spit at each other, and pull each other's hair out. I do not do nasty or unladylike things now when I am angry, but, Aunt Isobel, my 'besetting sin' is not conquered, it's only civilized."

"I quite agree with you," said Aunt Isobel; which rather annoyed me. I gulped this down, however, and went on:

"The sin of ill-temper, *if it is a sin*," I began. I paused, expecting an outburst, but Aunt Isobel sat quite composedly, and fingered her eyelashes.

"Of course the Rector would be horrified if I said such a thing at the confir-

mation-class," I continued, in a dissatisfied tone.

"Don't invent grievances, Isobel, for I see you have a real stumbling-block, when we can come to it. You are not at the confirmation-class, and I am not easily horrified."

"Well, there are two difficulties—I explain very stupidly," said I with some sadness.

"We'll take them one at a time," replied Aunt Isobel with an exasperating blandness, which fortunately stimulated me to plain-speaking.

"Everybody says one ought to 'restrain' one's temper, but I'm not sure if I think one ought. Isn't it better to *have things out*? Look at Philip. He's going to be confirmed, and then he'll go back to school, and when he and another boy quarrel, they'll fight it out, and feel comfortable afterwards. Aunt Isobel, I can quite understand feeling friendly after you've had it out, even if you're the one who is beaten, if it has been a fair fight. Now *restraining* your temper means forcing yourself to be good outside, and feeling all the worse inside, and feeling it longer. There is that utterly stupid little schoolroom-maid, who is under my orders, that I may teach her. Aunt Isobel, you would not credit how often I tell her the same thing, and how politely she says 'Yes, miss!' and how invariably she doesn't do it after all. I say, 'You *know* I told you only yesterday. What *is* the use of my trying to teach you?' and all kinds of mild things like that; but really I quite hate her for giving me so much trouble and taking so little herself, and I wish I might discharge her. Now, if only it wasn't wrong to throw—what are those things hot-tempered gentlemen always throw at their servants?"

"Don't ask me, my dear; ask Mr. Rampant."

"Oh, he throws everything. Bootjacks—that's it. Now, if only I might throw a bootjack at her, it would waken her up, and be such a relief to my feelings, that I shouldn't feel half so unforgiving towards her all along. Then as to swearing, Aunt Isobel——"

"Swearing!" ejaculated my aunt.

"Of course swearing is very wrong, and all profane-speaking; but I do think it *would be* a help if there was some innocent kind of strong language to use when one feels strongly."

"If we didn't use up all our innocent strong language by calling things awful and horrible that have not an element of awe or horror in them, we should have some left for our great occasions," said Aunt Isobel.

"Perhaps," said I, "but that's not exactly what I mean. Now do you think it would be wrong to invent expletives that mean nothing bad? As if Mr. Rampant were to say, 'Cockatoos and kingfishers! where are my shooting-boots?' For you know I do think it would make him more comfortable to put it in that way, especially if he had been kept waiting for them."

I paused, and Aunt Isobel turned round.

"Let us carry your idea well forward, Isobel. Bootjacks and expletives would no doubt be a relief to the thrower when hurled at servants or some one who could not (or from principle would not) retaliate, and the angry feelings that propelled them might be shortened by 'letting off the steam,' so to speak. But imagine yourself to have thrown a bootjack at Philip to relieve your feelings, and Philip (to relieve his) flinging it back at you. This would only give fresh impetus to *your* indignation, and whatever you threw next would not be likely to soothe *his*."

"Please don't!" said I. "Aunt Isobel, I could never throw a hatchet again."

"You are bold to promise to stop short anywhere when relieving passionate feelings by indulgence has begun on two sides. And, my dear, matters are no better where the indulgence is in words instead of blows. In the very mean and undignified position of abusing those who cannot return your abuse it might answer; but 'innocent strong language' would cease to be of any good when it was returned. If to 'Cockatoos and kingfishers! where are my shooting-boots?' an equally violent voice from below replied, 'Bats and blackbeetles! look for them yourself!' some stronger vent for the steam of hot temper would have to be found, and words of any kind would soon cease to relieve the feelings. Isobel, I have had long and hard experience, and your ideas are not new ones to me. Believe me, child, the only real relief is in absolute conquest, and the earlier the battle begins, the easier and the shorter it will be. If one can keep irritability under, one may escape a struggle to the death with passion. I am not cramming principles down your throat—I say as a matter of personal practice, that I do not know, and never hope to find, a smoother or a shorter way. But I can say also—after Victory comes Peace."

I gave a heavy sigh.

"Thank you, Aunt Isobel, I will try; but it makes my second difficulty all the worse. I can fancy that I might possibly learn self-control; I can fancy by main force holding my tongue, or compelling it to speak very slowly and civilly: but one can't force one's feelings. Aunt Isobel, if I had been very much insulted or provoked, I might keep on being civil for years on the outside, but how I should hate! You can't prevent yourself hating. People talk about 'forgive and forget.' If forgiving means doing no harm, and forgetting means behaving quite civilly, as if

nothing had happened, one could. But of course it's nonsense to talk of making yourself really *forget* anything. And I think it's just as absurd to talk of making yourself forgive, if forgiveness means feeling really kindly and comfortable as you did before. The very case in which I am most sure you are right about self-control is one of the worst the other way. I ought to be ashamed to speak of it—but I mean the hatchet-quarrel. If I had been very good instead of very wicked, and had restrained myself when Philip pulled all my work to pieces, and jeered at me for being miserable, I *couldn't* have loved him again as I did before. Forgive and forget! One would often be very glad to. I have often awoke in the morning and known that I had forgotten something disagreeable, and when it did come back I was sorry; but one's memory isn't made of slate, or one's heart either, that one can take a wet sponge and make it clean. Oh dear! I wonder why ill-tempered people are allowed to live! They ought to be smothered in their cradles."

Aunt Isobel was about to reply, but I interrupted her.

"Don't think me humble-minded, Aunt Isobel, for I'm not. Sometimes I feel inclined to think that ill-tempered people have more sense of justice and of the strict rights and wrongs of things—at least if they are not very bad," I interpolated, thinking of Mr. Rampant—"than people who can smile and look pleasant at everybody and everybody like Lucy Lambent, who goes on calling me darling when I know I'm scowling like a horned-owl. Nurse says she's the 'sweetest tempered young lady she ever did know!' Aunt Isobel, what a muddle life is!"

"After some years of it," said my aunt, pulling her lashes hard, "I generally say, What a muddle my head is! Life is too much for it."

"I am quite willing to put it that way," sighed I, laying my muddle-head on the table, for I was tired. "It comes to much the same thing. Now—there is my great difficulty! I give in about the other one, but you can't cure this, and the truth is, I am not fit to go to a confirmation-class, much less to the Holy Communion."

"Isobel," said my aunt, folding her hands on her lap, and bending her very thick brows on the fire, "I want you to clearly understand that I speak with great hesitation, and without any authority. I can do nothing for you but tell you what I have found myself in *my* struggles."

"Thank you a thousand times," said I, "that's what I want. You know I hear two sermons every Sunday, and I have a lot of good books. Mrs. Welment sends me a little book about ill-temper every Christmas. The last one was about saying a little hymn before you let yourself speak whenever you feel angry. Philip got hold of it, and made fun of it. He said it was like the recipe for catching a sparrow by putting salt on its tail, because if you were cool enough to say a hymn, there would then be no need for saying it. What do you think, Aunt Isobel?"

"My dear, I have long ago given up the idea that everybody's weak points can all be strengthened by one plaster. The hymn might be very useful in some cases, though I confess that it would not be in mine. But prayer is; and I find a form of prayer necessary. At the same time I have such an irritable taste, that there are very few forms of devotion that give me much help but the Prayer-Book collects and Jeremy Taylor. I do not know if you may find it useful to hear that in this struggle I sometimes find prayers more useful, if they are not too much to the sore point. A prayer about ill-temper might tend to make me cross, when the effort to join my spirit with the temptation-

tried souls of all ages in a solemn prayer for the Church Universal would lift me out of the petty sphere of personal vexations, better than going into my grievances even piously. I speak merely of myself, mind."

"Thank you," I said. "But about what I said about hating. Aunt Isobel, did you ever change your feelings by force? Do you suppose anybody ever did?"

"I believe it is a great mistake to trouble one's self with the spiritual experiences of other people when one cannot fully know their circumstances, so I won't suppose at all. As to what I am sure of, Isobel, you know I speak the truth."

"Yes," said I; it would have been impertinence to say more.

"I have found that if one fights for good behaviour, God makes one a present of the good feelings. I believe you will find it so. Even when you were a child, if you had tried to be good, and had managed to control yourself, and had not thrown the hatchet, I am quite sure you would not have hated Philip for long. Perhaps you would have thought how much better Philip used to behave before your father and mother died, and a little elder-sisterly, motherly feeling would have mixed with your wrath at seeing him with his fat legs planted apart, and his shoulders up, the very picture of wilful naughtiness. Perhaps you might have thought you had repulsed him a little harshly when he wanted to help, as you were his chief playmate and twin sister."

"Please don't," said I. "How I wish I had! Indeed I don't know how I can ever speak of hating one of the others when there are so few of us, and we are orphans. But everybody isn't one's brother. And—oh, Aunt Isobel, at the time one does get so wild, and hard, and twisted in one's heart!"

"I don't think it is possible to overrate the hardness of the first close struggle with

any natural passion," said my aunt earnestly; "but indeed the easiness of after-steps is often quite beyond one's expectations. The free gift of grace with which God perfects our efforts may come in many ways, but I am convinced that it is the common experience of Christians that it does come."

"To everyone, do you think?" said I. "I've no doubt it comes to you, Aunt Isobel, but then you are so good."

"For pity's sake don't say I am good," said my aunt, and she kicked down all the fire-irons; and then begged my pardon, and picked them up again.

We were silent for awhile. Aunt Isobel sat upright with her hands folded in her lap, and that look which her large eyes wear when she is trying to see all the sides of a question. They were dilated with a sorrowful earnestness when she spoke again.

"There *may* be some souls," she said, "whose brave and bitter lot it is to conquer comfortless. Perhaps some terrible inheritance of strong sin from the father is visited upon the son, and, only able to keep his purpose pure, he falls as fast as he struggles up, and still struggling falls again. Soft moments of peace with God and man may never come to him. He may feel himself viler than a thousand trumpery souls who could not have borne his trials for a day. Child, for you and for me is reserved no such cross and no such crown as theirs who falling still fight, and fighting fall, with their faces Zionwards, into the arms of the Everlasting Father. 'As one whom his mother comforteth' shall be the healing of *their* wounds."

There was a brisk knock at the door, and Philip burst in.

"Look here, Isobel, if you mean to be late for confirmation-class I'm not going to wait for you. I hate sneaking in with

the benches all full, and old Bartram blinking and keeping your place in the catechism for you with his fat forefinger."

"I am *very* sorry, Philip dear," said I; "please go without me, and I'll come on as quickly as I can. Thank you very much for coming to remind me."

"There's no such awful hurry," said Philip in a mollified tone; "I'll wait for you downstairs."

Which he did, whistling.

Aunt Isobel and I are not demonstrative, it does not suit us. She took hold of my arms, and I laid my head on her shoulder.

"Aunt Isobel, God help me, I will fight on to the very end."

"He *will* help you," said Aunt Isobel.

I could not look at her face and doubt it. Oh, my weak soul, never doubt it more!

CHAPTE V.

CELESTIAL FIRE—I CHOOSE A TEXT.

WE were confirmed.

As Aunt Isobel had said, I was spared perplexity by the unmistakable nature of my weakest point. There was no doubt as to what I should pray against and strive against. But on that day it seemed not only as if I could never give way to ill-temper again, but as if the trumpery causes of former outbreaks could never even tempt me to do so. As the lines of that ancient hymn to the Holy Ghost—"Veni Creator"—rolled on, I prayed humbly enough that my unworthy efforts might yet be crowned by the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit; but that a soul which sincerely longed to be "lightened with celestial fire" could be tempted to a common fit of sulks or scolding by the

rub of nursery misdeeds and mischances, felt then so little likely as hardly to be worth deprecating on my knees.

And yet, when the service was over, the fatigue of the mental strain and of long kneeling and standing began to tell in a feeling that came sadly near to peevishness. I spent the rest of the day resolutely in my room and on my knees, hoping to keep up those high thoughts and emotions which had made me feel happy as well as good. And yet I all but utterly broke down into the most commonplace crossness because Philip did not do as I did, but romped noisily with the others, and teased me for looking grave at tea.

I just did not break down. So much remained alive of the "celestial fire," that I kept my temper behind my teeth. Long afterwards, when I learnt by accident that Philip's "good resolve" on the occasion had been that he would be kinder to "the little ones," I was very glad that I had not indulged my uncharitable impulse to lecture him on indifference to spiritual progress.

That evening Aunt Isobel gave me a new picture for my room. It was a fine print of the Crucifixion, for which I had often longed, a German woodcut in the powerful manner of Albert Dürer, after a design by Michael Angelo. It was neither too realistic nor too mediæval, and the face was very noble. Aunt Isobel had had it framed, and below on an illuminated scroll was written—"What are these wounds in Thine Hands? Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends."

"I often think," she said, when we had hung it up and were looking at it, "that it is not in our Lord's Cross and Passion that His patience comes most home to us. To be patient before an unjust judge or brutal soldiers might be almost a part of

self-respect; but patience with the daily disappointments of a life 'too good for this world,' as people say, patience with the follies, the unworthiness, the ingratitude of those one loves—these things are our daily example. For wounds in the house of our enemies pride may be prepared; wounds in the house of our friends take human nature by surprise, and God only can teach us to bear them. And with all reverence I think that we may say that ours have an element of difficulty in which His were wanting. They are mixed with blame on our own parts."

"That is why you have put that text for me?" said I. My aunt nodded.

I was learning to illuminate, and I took much pride in my room. I determined to make a text for myself, and to choose a very plain passage about ill-temper. Mrs. Welment's books supplied me with plenty. I chose "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," but I resolved to have the complete text as it stands in the Bible. It seemed fair to allow myself to remember that anger is not always a sin, and I thought it useful to remind myself that if by obstinate ill-temper I got the victory in a quarrel, it was only because the devil had got the victory over me. So the text ran full length:—"Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil." It made a very long scroll, and I put it up over my window, and fastened it with drawing-pins.

CHAPTER VI.

THEATRICAL PROPERTIES—I PREPARE A PLAY—PHILIP BEGINS TO PREPARE THE SCENERY—A NEW FRIEND.

PHILIP was at school during the remainder of the year, but I tried to put my good

resolves in practice with the children, and it made us a more peaceful household than usual. When Philip came home for the Christmas holidays we were certainly in very pleasant moods—for an ill-tempered family.

Our friends allow that some quickness of wits accompanies the quickness of our tempers. From the days when we were very young our private theatricals have been famous in our own little neighbourhood. I was paramount in nursery mummies, and in the children's charade parties of the district, for Philip was not very reliable when steady help was needed; but at school he became stage-manager of the theatricals there.

I do not know that he learned to act very much better than I, and I think Alice (who was only twelve) had twice the gift of either of us, but every half he came back more ingenious than before in matters for which we had neither the talent nor the tools. He glued together yards of canvas or calico, and produced scenes and drop-curtains which were ambitious and effective, though I thought him a little reckless both about good drawing and good clothes. His glue-kettles and size-pots were always steaming, his paint was on many and more inappropriate objects than the canvas. A shilling's worth of gilding powder went such a long way that we had not only golden crowns and golden sceptres, and golden chains for our dungeon, and golden wings for our fairies, but the nursery furniture became irregularly and unintentionally gilded, as well as nurse's stuff dress, when she sat on a warrior's shield, which was drying in the rocking-chair.

But these were small matters. Philip gave us a wonderful account of the "properties" he had made for school theatricals. A dragon painted to the life, and with matches so fixed into the tip of him that the boy who acted as the life and soul of

this ungainly carcass could wag a fiery tail before the amazed audience, by striking it on that particular scale of his dragon's skin which was made of sand-paper. Rabbit-skin masks, cotton-wool wigs and wigs of tow, seven-league boots, and witches' hats, thunder with a tea-tray, and all the phases of the moon with a moderator lamp—with all these things Philip enriched the school theatre, though for some time he would not take so much trouble for our own.

But during this last half he had written me three letters—and three very kind ones. In the latest he said that—partly because he had been making some things for us, and partly because of changes in the school-theatrical affairs—he should bring home with him a box of very valuable "properties" for our use at Christmas. He charged me at once to prepare a piece which should include a prince disguised as a woolly beast on two legs with large forepaws (easily shaken off), a fairy godmother with a tow wig and the highest hat I could ever hope to see, a princess turned into a willow-tree (painted from memory of the old one at home, and with fine gnarls and knots, through which the princess could see everything, and prompt (if needful), a disconsolate parent, and a faithful attendant, to be acted by one person, with as many belated travellers as the same actor could personate into the bargain. These would all be eaten up by the dragon at the right wing, and re-enter more belated than ever at the left, without stopping longer than was required to roll a peal of thunder at the back. The fifth and last character was to be the dragon himself. The forest scene would be wanted, and I was to try and get an old cask for a cave.

I must explain that I was not expected to write a play. We never took the trouble to "learn parts." We generally took some

story which pleased us out of Grimm's Fairy Tales or the Arabian Nights, and arranged for the various scenes. We each had a copy of the arrangement, and our proper characters were assigned to us. After this we did the dialogue as if it had been a charade. We were well accustomed to act together, and could trust each other and ourselves. Only Alice's brilliancy ever took us by surprise.

By the time that Philip came home I had got in the rough outline of the plot. He arrived with a box of properties, the mere size of which raised a cheer of welcome from the little ones, and red-hot for our theatricals.

Philip was a little apt to be red-hot over projects, and to cool before they were accomplished; but on this occasion we had no forebodings of such evil. Besides, he was to play the dragon! When he did fairly devote himself to anything, he grudged no trouble and hesitated at no undertakings. He was so much pleased with my plot and with the cave, that he announced that he should paint a new forest scene for the occasion. I tried to dissuade him. There were so many other things to be done, and the old scene was very good. But he had learnt several new tricks of the scene-painter's trade, and was bent upon putting them into practice. So he began his new scene, and I resolved to work all the harder at the odds and ends of our preparations. To be driven into a corner and pressed for time always stimulated instead of confusing me. I think the excitement of it is pleasant. Alice had the same dogged way of working at a crisis, and we felt quite confident of being able to finish up "at a push," whatever Philip might leave undone. The theatricals were to be on Twelfth Night.

Christmas passed very happily on the whole. I found my temper much oftener tried since Philip's return, but this was not

only because he was very wilful and very fond of teasing, but because with the younger ones I was always deferred to.

One morning we were very busy in the nursery, which was our workshop. Philip's glue-pots and size-pots were steaming, there were coloured powders on every chair, Alice and I were laying a coat of invisible green over the cave-cask, and Philip, in radiant good-humour, was giving distance to his woodland glades in the most artful manner with powder-blue, and calling on us for approbation—when the housemaid came in.

"It's *not* lunch-time?" cried Alice. "It can't be!"

"Get away, Mary," said Philip, "and tell cook if she puts on any more meals I'll paint her best cap pea-green. She's sending up luncheons and dinners all day long now: just because she knows we're busy."

Mary only laughed, and said, "It's a gentleman wants to see you, Master Philip," and she gave him a card. Philip read it, and we waited with some curiosity.

"It's a man I met in the train," said he, "a capital fellow. He lives in the town. His father's a doctor there. Granny must invite him to the theatricals. Ask him to come here, Mary, and show him the way."

"Oughtn't you to go and fetch him yourself?" said I.

"I can't leave this," said Philip. "He'll be all right. He's as friendly as possible."

I must say here that "Granny" was our maternal grandmother, with whom we lived. My mother and father were cousins, and Granny's husband was of that impetuous race to which we belonged. If he had been alive he would have kept us all in good order, no doubt. But he was dead, and Granny was the gentlest of old ladies: I fear she led a terrible life with us all!

Philip's friend came upstairs. He *was* very friendly; in fact Alice and I thought him forward, but he was several years older than Philip, who seemed proud of the acquaintance. Perhaps Alice and I were biassed by the fact that he spoilt our pleasant morning. He was one of those people who look at everything one has been working at with such unintelligent eyes that their indifference ought not to dishearten one; and yet it does.

"It's for our private theatricals," said Philip, as Mr. Clinton's amazed stare passed from our paint-covered selves to the new scene.

"My cousins in Dublin have private theatricals," said Mr. Clinton. "My uncle has built on a room for the theatre. All the fittings and scenes come from London, and the first costumiers in Dublin send in all the dresses and everything that is required on the afternoon before the performance."

"Oh, we're in a much smaller way," said Philip; "but I've some properties here that don't look bad by candlelight." But Mr. Clinton had come up to the cask, and was staring at it and us. I knew by the way Alice got quietly up, and shook some chips with a decided air out of her apron, that she did not like being stared at. But her movement only drew Mr. Clinton's especial attention.

"You'll catch it from your grandmamma for making such a mess of your clothes, won't you?" he asked.

"I *beg* your pardon?" said Alice, with so perfect an air of not having heard him that he was about to repeat the question, when she left the nursery with the exact exit which she had made as a Discreet Princess repelling unwelcome advances in last year's play.

I was afraid of an outburst from Philip, and said in hasty civility, "This is a cave we are making."

"They'd a splendid cave at Covent Garden last Christmas," said Mr. Clinton. "It covered half the stage. An enormously tall man dressed in cloth of silver stood in the entrance, and waved a spear ten or twelve feet long over his head. A fairy was let down above that, so you may be sure the cave was pretty big."

"Oh, here's the dragon," said Philip, who had been rummaging in the property box. "He's got a fiery tail."

"They were quite the go in pantomimes a few years ago," said Mr. Clinton, yawning. "My uncle had two or three—bigger than that, of course."

Philip saw that his friend was not interested in amateur property-making, and changed the subject.

"What have you been doing this morning?" said he.

"I drove here with my father, who had got to pass your gates. I say, there's splendid shooting on the marsh now. I want you to come out with me, and we'll pot a wild duck or two."

"I've no gun," said Philip, and to soften the statement added, "there's no one here to go out with."

"I'll go out with you. And I say, we could just catch the train back to the town, and if you'll come and lunch with us, we'll go out a bit this afternoon and look round. But you must get a gun."

"I should like some fresh air," said Philip, "and as you've come over for me——"

I knew the appealing tone in his voice was for my ears, for my face had fallen.

"Could I be going on with it?" I asked, nodding towards the forest scene.

"Oh dear no! I'll go at it again to-night. It ought all to be painted by candle-light by rights. I'm not going to desert my post," he added.

"I hope not," said I as good-humouredly as I could; but dismay was in my heart.

CHAPTER VII.

A QUARREL—BOBBY IS WILLING—EXIT PHILIP.

PHILIP came back by an evening train, and when he had had something to eat he came up to the nursery to go on with the scene. We had got everything ready for him, and he worked for about half an hour. But he was so sleepy, with cold air and exercise, that he did not paint well, and then he got impatient, and threw it up—"till the morning."

In the morning he set to work, talking all the time about wild duck and teal, and the price of guns; but by the time he had put last night's blunders straight, the front door bell rang, and Mary announced "Mr. Clinton."

Philip was closeted in his room with his new friend till twelve o'clock. Then they went out into the yard, and finally Mr. Clinton stayed to luncheon. But I held my peace, and made Alice hold hers. Mr. Clinton went away in the afternoon, but Philip got the plate-powder and wash-leather, and occupied himself in polishing the silver fittings of his dressing-case.

"I think you might do that another time, Philip," said I; "you've not been half an hour at the properties to-day, and you could clean your bottles and things quite as well after the theatricals."

"As it happens I just couldn't," said Philip; "I've made a bargain, and bargains won't wait."

Alice and I screamed in one breath, "You're *not* going to give away the dressing-case!"—for it had been my father's.

"I said a *bargain*," replied Philip, rubbing harder than ever; "you can't get hold of a gun every day without paying down hard cash."

"I hate Mr. Clinton!" said Alice.

It was a very unfortunate speech, for it declared open war; and when this is done it cannot be undone. There is no taking back those sharp sayings which the family curse hangs on the tips of our tongues.

Philip and Alice exchanged them pretty freely. Philip called us selfish, inhospitable, and jealous. He said we grudged his enjoying himself in the holidays, when he had been working like a slave for us during the half. That we disliked his friend because he *was* his friend, and (not to omit the taunt of sex) that Clinton was too manly a fellow to please girls, etc., etc. In self-defence Alice was much more out-spoken about both Philip and Mr. Clinton than she had probably intended to be. That Philip began things hotly, and that his zeal cooled before they were accomplished—that his imperiousness laid him open to flattery, and the necessity of playing first-fiddle betrayed him into second-rate friendships, which were thrown after the discarded hobbies—that Mr. Clinton was ill-bred, and with that vulgarity of mind which would make him rather proud than ashamed of getting the best of a bargain with his friend—these things were not the less taunts because they were true.

If the violent scenes which occur in ill-tempered families *felt* half as undignified and miserable as they *look*, surely they would be less common! I believe Philip and Alice would have come to blows if I had not joined with him to expel her from the room. I was not happy about it, for my sympathy was on her side of the quarrel, but she had been the one to declare war, and I could not control Philip. In short, it is often not easy to keep the peace and be just too, as I should like to have said to Aunt Isobel, if she had been at home. But she was to be away until the 6th.

Alice defeated, I took Philip seriously to task. Not about his friend—the subject was too sore, and Alice had told him all that we thought, and rather more than we thought on that score—but about the theatricals. I said if he really was tired of the business we would throw it up, and let our friends know that the proposed entertainment had fallen through, but that if he wanted it to go forward he must decide what help he would give, and then abide by his promise.

We came to terms. If I would let him have a day or two's fun with his gun, Philip promised to "spurt," as he called it, at the end. I told him we would be content if he would join in a "thorough rehearsal," the afternoon before, and devote himself to the business on the day of the performance.

"Real business, you know," I added, "with nobody but ourselves. Nobody coming in to interrupt."

"Of course," said Philip; "but I'll do more than that, Isobel. There's the scene——"

"*We'll* finish the scene," said I, "if you don't aggravate Alice so that I lose her help as well as yours."

Alice was very sulky, which I could hardly wonder at, and I worked alone, except for Bobby, the only one with anything like a good temper among us, who roasted himself very patiently with my size-pot, and hammered bits of ivy, and of his fingers, rather neatly over the cave. But Alice was impulsive and kind-hearted. When I got a bad headache, from working too long, she came round, and helped me. Philip was always going to do so, but as a matter of fact he went out every day with the old fowling-piece for which he had given his dressing-case.

When the ice bore Charles also deserted us, but Alice and I worked steadily on at

dresses and scenery. And Bobby worked with us.

The 5th of January arrived, the day before the theatricals. Philip spent the morning in cleaning his gun, and after luncheon he brought it into the nursery to "finish" with a peculiarly aggravating air.

"When shall you be ready to rehearse?" I asked.

"Oh, presently," said Philip, "there's plenty of time yet. It's a great nuisance," he added. "I'll never have anything to do with theatricals again. They make a perfect slave of one."

"*You've* not slaved much, at any rate," said Charles.

"You'd better not give me any of your cheek," said Philip threateningly.

"We've done without him for a week, I don't know why we shouldn't do without him to-morrow," muttered Alice from the corner where she was sewing gold paper stars on to the Enchanted Prince's tunic.

"I wish you could," growled Philip, who took the suggestion more quietly than I expected; "anybody could do the Dragon, there's no acting in it!"

"I won't," said Charles, "Isobel gave me the Enchanted Prince or the Woolly Beast, and I shall stick to my part."

"Could I do the Dragon?" asked Bobby, releasing his hot face from the folds of an old blue cloak lined with red, in which he was rehearsing his walk as a belated wayfarer.

"Certainly not," said I, "you're the Bereaved Father and the Faithful Attendant to begin with, and I hope you won't muddle them. And you're Twelve Travellers as well, and the thunder, remember!"

"I don't care how many I do, if only I can," said Bobby, drawing his willing arm across his steaming forehead. "I should like to have a fiery tail."

"You can't devour yourself once—let

alone twelve times," said I sternly. "Don't be silly, Bob."

It was not Bob I was impatient with in reality, it was Philip.

"If you really mean to desert the theatricals after all you promised, I would much rather try to do without you," said I indignantly.

"Then you may!" retorted Philip. "I wash my hands of it and of the whole lot of you, and of every nursery entertainment henceforward!" and he got the fragments of his gun together with much clatter. But Charles had posted himself by the door to say his say, and to be ready to escape when he had said it.

"You're ashamed of it," that's it, said he; "you want to sit among the grown-ups with a spy-glass, now you've got Apothecary Clinton's son for a friend,"—and after this brief and insulting summary of the facts, Charles vanished. But Philip, white with anger, was too quick for him, and at the top of the backstairs he dealt him such a heavy blow that Charles fell headlong down the first flight.

Alice and I flew to the rescue. I lived in dread of Philip really injuring Charles some day, for his blows were becoming serious ones as he grew taller and stronger, and his self-control did not seem to wax in proportion. And Charles's temper was becoming very aggressive. On this occasion, as soon as he had regained breath, and we found that no bones were broken, it was only by main force that we held him back from pursuing Philip.

"I'll hit him—I'll stick to him," he sobbed in his fury, shaking his head like a terrier, and doubling his fists. But he was rather sick with the fall, and we made him lie down to recover himself, whilst Alice, Bobby and I laid our heads together to plan a substitute for Philip in the Dragon.

When bed-time came, and Philip was

still absent, we became uneasy, and as I lay sleepless that night I asked myself if I had been to blame for the sulks in which he had gone off. In fits of passion Philip had often threatened to go away and never let us hear of him again. I knew that such things did happen, and it made me unhappy when he went off like this, although his threats had hitherto been no more than a common and rather unfair device of ill-temper.



CHAPTER VIII.

I HEAR FROM PHILIP—A NEW PART WANTED—I LOSE MY TEMPER—WE ALL LOSE OUR TEMPER.

NEXT morning's post brought the following letter from Philip:—

"MY DEAR ISOBEL,

"You need not bother about the Dragon—I'll do it. But I wish you would put another character into the piece. It is for Clinton. He says he will act with us. He says he can do anything if it is a leading part. He has got black velvet knickerbockers and scarlet stockings, and he can have the tunic and cloak I wore last year, and the flap hat; and you must lend him your white ostrich feather. Make him some kind of a grandee. If you can't, he must be the Prince, and Charles can do some of the Travellers. We are going out on the marsh this morning, but I shall be with you after luncheon, and Clinton in the evening. He does not want any rehearsing, only a copy of the plan. Let Alice make it, her writing is the clearest, and I wish she would make me a new one; I've torn mine, and it is so

dirty, I shall never be able to read it inside the Dragon. Don't forget.

"Your affectionate brother,
PHILIP."

There are limits to one's patience, and with some of us they are not very wide. Philip had passed the bounds of mine, and my natural indignation was heightened by a sort of revulsion from last night's anxiety on his account. His lordly indifference to other people's feelings was more irritating than the trouble he gave us by changing his mind.

"You won't let him take the Woolly Beast from me, Isobel?" cried Charles. "And you know you promised to lend *me* your ostrich plume."

"Certainly not," said I. "And you shall have the feather. I promised."

"If Mr. Clinton acts—I shan't," said Alice.

"Mr. Clinton won't act," said I, "I can't alter the piece now. But I wish, Alice, you were not always so very ready to drive things into a quarrel."

"If we hadn't given way to Philip so much he wouldn't think we can bear anything," said Alice.

I could not but feel that there was some truth in this, and that it was a dilemma not provided against in Aunt Isobel's teaching, that one may be so obliging to those one lives with as to encourage, if not to teach them to be selfish.

Perhaps it would have been well if on the first day when Philip deserted us Alice and I had spent the afternoon with Lucy Lambent, and if we had continued to amuse ourselves with our friends when Philip amused himself with his. We should then have been forced into a common decision as to whether the play should be given up, and, without reproaches or counter-reproaches, Philip would have learned that he could not leave all the

work to us, and then arrange and disarrange the plot at his own pleasure, or rather, he would never have thought that he could. But a plan of this kind requires to be carried out with perfect coolness to be either justifiable or effective. And we have not a cool head amongst us.

One thing was clear. I ought to keep faith with the others who had worked when Philip would not. Charles should not be turned out of his part. I rather hustled over the question of a new part for Mr. Clinton in my mind. I disliked him, and did not want to introduce him. I said to myself that it was quite unreasonable—out of the question in fact—and I prepared to say so to Philip.

Of course he was furious—that I knew he would be; but I was firm.

"Charles can be the Old Father, and the Family Servant too," said he. "They're both good parts."

"Then give them to Mr. Clinton," said I, well knowing that he would not. "Charles has taken a great deal of pains with his part, and these are his holidays as well as yours, and the Prince shall not be taken from him."

"Well, I say it shall. And Charles may be uncommonly glad if I let him act at all after the way he behaved yesterday."

"The way *you* behaved, you mean," said I—for my temper was slipping from my grasp;—"you might have broken his neck."

"All the more danger in his provoking me, and in your encouraging him."

I began to feel giddy, which is always a bad sign with us. It rang in my mind's ear that this was what came of being forbearing with a bully like Philip. But I still tried to speak quietly.

"If you think," said I through my teeth, "that I am going to let you knock the others about, and rough-ride it over our theatricals, you are mistaken."

"Your theatricals!" cried Philip, mimicking me. "I like that! Whom do the properties belong to, pray?"

"If it goes by buying," was my reply to this rather difficult question, "most of them belong to Granny, for the canvas and the paints and the stuff for the dresses, have gone down in the bills; and if it goes by work, I think we have done quite as much as you. And if some of the properties *are* yours, the play is mine. And as to the scene—you did the distance in the middle of the wood, but Alice and I painted all the foreground."

"Then you may keep your foreground, and I'll take my distance," roared Philip, and in a moment his pocket-knife was open, and he had cut a hole a foot-and-a-half square in the centre of the Enchanted Forest, and Bobby's amazed face (he was running a tuck in his cloak behind the scenes) appeared through the aperture.

If a kind word would have saved the fruits of our week's hard labour, not one of us would have spoken it. We sacrifice anything we possess in our ill-tempered family—except our wills.

"And you may take your play, and I'll take my properties," continued Philip, gathering up hats, wigs, and what not from the costumes which Alice and I had arranged in neat groups ready for the green-room. "I'll give everything to Clinton this evening for his new theatre, and we'll see how you get on without the Fiery Dragon."

"Clinton *can't* want a fiery dragon when he's got you," said Charles, in a voice of mock compliment.

The Fairy Godmother's crabstick was in Philip's hand. He raised it, and flew at Charles, but I threw myself between them and caught Philip's arm.

"You shall not hit him," I cried.

Aunt Isobel is right about one thing. If one *does* mean to stop short in a quarrel

one must begin at a very early stage. It is easier to smother one's feelings than to check one's words. By the time it comes to blows it is like trying to pull up a runaway horse. The first pinch Philip gave to my arm set my brain on fire. When he threw me heavily against the cave with a mocking laugh, and sprang after Charles, I could not have yielded an inch to him to save my life—not to earn Fortunatus' purse, or three fairy wishes—not to save whatever I most valued.

What would have induced me? I do not know, but I know that I am very glad it is not quite so easy to sell one's soul at one bargain as fairy-tales make out!

My struggle with Philip had given Charles time to escape. Philip could not find him, and rough as were the words with which he returned to me, I fancy they cost him some effort of self-control, and they betrayed to Alice's instinct and mine that he would have been glad to get out of the extremity to which our tempers had driven matters.

"Look here!" said he in a tone which would have been perfect if we had been acting a costermonger and his wife. "Are you going to make Clinton the Prince or not?"

"I am not," said I, nursing my elbow, which was cut by a nail on the cask. "I am not going to do anything whatever for Mr. Clinton, and I ought to be cured of working for you."

"You have lost an opening to make peace," said an inner voice. "You've given the yielding plan a fair trial, and it has failed," said self-justification—the swiftest pleader I know. "There are some people, with self-satisfied, arbitrary tempers, upon whom gentleness is worse than wasted, because it misleads them. They have that remnant of savage notions which drives them to mistake generosity for weakness. The only way to convince

them is to hit them harder than they hit you. And it is the kindest plan for everybody concerned."

I am bound to say—though it rather confuses some of my ideas—that experience has convinced me that this last statement is not without truth. But I am also bound to say that it was not really applicable to Philip. He is not as generous as Alice, but I had no good reason to believe that kindly concession would be wasted on him.

When I had flung my last defiance, Philip replied in violent words of a kind which girls in our class of life do not (happily!) use, even in a rage. They were partly drowned by the clatter with which he dragged his big box across the floor, and filled it with properties of all kinds, from the Dragon to the foot-light reflectors.

"I am going by the 4.15 to the town," said he, as he pulled the box out towards his own room. "You need not wait for either Clinton or me. Pray 'ring up' punctually!"

At this moment—having fully realised the downfall of the theatricals—Bobby burst into a howl of weeping. Alice scolded him for crying, and Charles reproached her for scolding him, on the score that her antipathy to Mr. Clinton had driven Philip to this extreme point of insult and ill-treatment.

Charles's own conduct had been so far from soothing, that Alice had abundant material for retorts, and she was not likely to be a loser in the war of words. What she did say I did not hear, for by that time I had locked myself up in my own room.

CHAPTER IX.

SELF-REPROACH — FAMILY DISCOMFORT — OUT ON THE MARSH — VICTORY.

IF I could have locked myself up anywhere else I should have preferred it. I would have justified my own part in the present family quarrel to Aunt Isobel herself, and yet I would rather not have been alone just now with the text I had made and pinned up, and with my new picture. However, there was nowhere else to go to.

A restless way I have of pacing up and down when I am in a rage, has often reminded me of the habits of the more ferocious of the wild beasts in the Zoological Gardens, and has not lessened my convictions on the subject of the family temper. For a few prowls up and down my den I managed to occupy my thoughts with fuming against Philip's behaviour, but as the first flush of anger began to cool, there was no keeping out of my head the painful reflections which the sight of my text, my picture, and my books suggested—the miserable contrast between my good resolves and the result.

"It only shows," I muttered to myself, in a voice about as amiable as the growlings of a panther, "it only shows that it is quite hopeless. We're an ill-tempered family—a hopelessly ill-tempered family; and to try to cure us is like patching the lungs of a consumptive family. I don't even wish that I *could* forgive Philip. He doesn't deserve it."

And then as I nursed the cut on my elbow, and recalled the long hours of work at the properties, the damaged scene, the rifling of the green-room, and Philip's desertion with the Dragon, his probable

industry for Mr. Clinton's theatricals, and the way he had left us to face our own disappointed audience, fierce indignation got the upper hand once more.

"I don't care," I growled afresh; "if I have lost my temper, I believe I was right to lose it—at least, that no one could have been expected not to lose it. I will never beg his pardon for it, let Aunt Isobel say what she will. I should hate him ever after if I did, for the injustice of the thing. Pardon, indeed!"

I turned at the top of the room and paced back towards the window, towards the long illuminated text, and that

"Noble face,
So sweet and full of grace,"

which bent unchangeable from the emblem of suffering and self-sacrifice.

I have a trick of talking to myself and to inanimate objects. I addressed myself now to the text and the picture.

"But if I don't," I continued, "if after being confirmed with Philip in the autumn, we come to just one of our old catastrophes in the very next holidays, as bad as ever, and spiting each other to the last—I shall take you all down to-morrow! I don't pretend to be able to persuade myself that black is white—like Mrs. Rampant; but I am not a hypocrite, I won't ornament my room with texts, and crosses, and pictures, and symbols of Eternal Patience, when I do not even mean to *try* to sacrifice myself, or to be patient."

It is curious how one's faith and practice hang together. I felt very doubtful whether it was even desirable that I should. Whether we did not misunderstand God's will, in thinking that it is well that people in the right should ever sacrifice themselves for those who are in the wrong. I did not however hide from myself, that to say this was to unsay all my resolves about my besetting sin. I decided to take down

my texts, pictures, and books, and grimly thought that I would frame a fine photograph Charles had given me of a lioness, and would make a new inscription, the motto of the old Highland Clan Chattan—with which our family is remotely connected—"*Touch not the cat but a glove.*"*

"Put on your gloves next time, Master Philip!" I thought. "I shall make no more of these feeble attempts to keep in my claws, which only tempt you to irritate me beyond endurance. We're an ill-tempered family, and you're not the most amiable member of it. For my own part, I can control my temper when it is not running away with me, and be fairly kind to the little ones, so long as they do what I tell them. But, at a crisis like this, I can no more yield to your unreasonable wishes, stifle my just anger, apologise for a little wrong to you who owe apologies for a big one, and pave the way to peace with my own broken will, than the leopard can change his spots."

"And yet—if I could!"

It broke from me almost like a cry, "If my besetting sin *is* a sin, if I have given way to it under provocation—if this moment is the very hardest of the battle, and the day is almost lost—and if now, even now, I could turn round and tread down this Satan under my feet. If this were to-morrow morning, and I had done it—O my soul, what triumph, what satisfaction in past prayers, what hope for the future! Then thou shouldest believe the old legends of sinners numbered with the saints, of tyrants taught to be gentle, of the unholy learning to be pure—for one believes with heartiness what he has experienced—then text and picture and cross should hang on, in spite of frailty, and in this sign shalt thou conquer."

One ought to be very thankful for the blessings of good health and strong nerves,

* *Anglicè*, "without a glove."

but I sometimes wish I could cry more easily. I should not like to be like poor Mrs. Rampant, whose head or back is always aching, and whose nerves make me think of the strings of an Æolian harp, on which Mr. Rampant, like rude Boreas, is perpetually playing with the tones of his voice, the creak of his boots, and the bang of his doors. But her tears do relieve, if they exhaust her, and back-ache cannot be as bad as heart-ache—hot, dry heart-ache, or cold, hard heart-ache. I think if I could have cried I could have felt softer. As it was I began to wish that I could do what I felt sure that I could not.

If I dragged myself to Philip, and got out a few conciliatory words, I should break down in a worse fury than before if he sneered or rode the high horse, "as he probably would," thought I.

On my little carved Prayer-book shelf, lay with other volumes a copy of A'Kempis, which had belonged to my mother. Honesty had already whispered that if I deliberately gave up the fight with evil this must be banished with my texts and pictures. At the present moment a familiar passage came into my head:

"When one that was in great anxiety of mind, often wavering between fear and hope, did once humbly prostrate himself in prayer, and said, 'O if I knew that I should persevere!' he presently heard within him an answer from GOD, which said, 'If thou didst know it, what would'st thou do? Do what thou would'st do then, and thou shalt be safe.'"

Supposing I began to do right, and trusted the rest? I could try to speak to Philip, and it would be something even if I stopped short and ran away. Or if I could not drag my feet to him, I could take Aunt Isobel's advice, and pray. I might not be able to speak civilly to Philip, or even to pray about him in my present state of mental confusion, but I could repeat *some* prayer reverently. Would

it not be better to start on the right road, even if I fell by the way?

I crossed the room in three strides to the place where I usually say my prayers. I knelt, and folded my hands, and shut my eyes, and began to recite the *Te Deum* in my head, trying to attend to it. I did attend pretty well, but it was mere attention, till I felt slightly softened at the verse—"Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting." For my young mother was very good, and I always think of her when the choir comes to that verse on Sundays.

"Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin." "It's too late to ask that," thought I, with that half of my brain which was not attending to the words of the *Te Deum*, "and yet there is a little bit of the day left which will be dedicated either to good or evil."

I prayed the rest, "O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us. O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us, as our trust is in Thee. O Lord, in Thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded!" and with the last verse there came from my heart a very passion of desire for strength to do the will of GOD at the sacrifice of my own. I flung myself on the floor with inarticulate prayers that were very fully to the point now, and they summed themselves up again in the old words, "In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted, let me never be confounded!"

When I raised my head I caught sight of the picture, and for an instant felt a superstitious thrill. The finely drawn face shone with a crimson glow. But in a moment more I saw the cause, and exclaimed—"The sun is setting! I must speak to Philip before it goes down."

What should I say? Somehow, now, my judgment felt very clear and decisive. I would not pretend that he had been in the right, but I would acknowledge where

I had been in the wrong. I *had* been disobliging about Mr. Clinton, and I would say so, and offer to repair that matter. I would regret having lost my temper, and say nothing about his. I would not offer to deprive Charles of his part, or break my promise of the white feather; but I would make a new part for Mr. Clinton, and he should be quite welcome to any finery in my possession except Charles's plume. This concession was no difficulty to me. Bad as our tempers are, I am thankful to say they are not mean ones. If I dressed out Mr. Clinton at all, it would come natural to do it liberally. I would do all this—if I could. I might break down into passion at the mere sight of Philip and the properties, but at least I would begin "as if I knew I should persevere."

At this moment the front door was shut with a bang which shook the house.

It was Philip going to catch the 4.15. I bit my lips, and began to pull on my boots, watching the red sun as it sank over the waste of marshland which I could see from my window. I must try to overtake him, but I could run well, and I suspected that he would not walk fast. I did not believe that he was really pleased at the break up of our plans and the prospect of a public exposure of our squabbles, though as a family we are always willing to make fools of ourselves rather than conciliate each other.

My things were soon on, and I hurried from my room. In the window-seat of the corridor was Alice. The sight of her reproached me. She slept in my room, but I jealously retained full power over it, and when I locked myself in she dared not disturb me.

"I'm afraid you've been wanting to come in," said I. "Do go in now."

"Thank you," said Alice, "I've nowhere

to go to." Then tightening her lips, she added, "Philip's gone."

"I know," said I. "I'm going to try and get him back." Alice stared in amazement.

"You always do spoil Philip, because he's your twin," she said, at last; "you wouldn't do it for me."

"Oh, Alice, you don't know. I'd much rather do it for you, girls are so much less aggravating than boys. But don't try and make it harder for me to make peace."

"I beg your pardon, Isobel. If you do, you're an angel. I couldn't, to save my life."

At the head of the stairs I met Charles.

"He's gone," said he significantly, and bestriding the balustrades, he shot to the foot. When I reached him he was pinching the biceps muscle of his arm.

"Feel, Isobel," said he. "It's hard, isn't it?"

"Very, Charles, but I'm in a hurry."

"Look here," he continued, with an ugly expression on his face, "I'm going into training. I'm going to eat bits of raw mutton, and dumb-bell. Wait a year, wait half a year, and I shall be able to thrash him. I'll make him remember these theatricals. I don't forget. I haven't forgot his bursting my football out of spite."

It is not pleasant to see one's own sins reflected on other faces. I could not speak.

By the front door was Bobby. He was by way of looking out of the portico window, but his swollen eyes could not possibly have seen anything.

"Oh, Isobel, Isobel!" he sobbed, "Philip's gone, and taken the D—d—dragon with him, and we're all m—m—m—miserable."

"Don't cry, Bobby," said I, kissing him. "Finish your cloak, and be doing

anything you can. I'm going to try and bring Philip back."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Isobel! If only he'll come back I don't care what I do. Or I'll give up my parts if he wants them, and be a scene-shifter, if you'll lend me your carpet-slippers, and make me a paper cap."

"God has given you a very sweet temper, Bobby," said I, solemnly. "I wish I had one like it."

"You're as good as gold," said Bobby. His loving hug added strength to my resolutions, and I ran across the garden and jumped the ha-ha, and followed Philip over the marsh. I do not know whether he heard my steps when I came nearly up with him, but I fancy his pace slackened. Not that he looked round. He was much too sulky.

Philip is a very good-looking boy, much handsomer than I am, though we are alike. But the family curse disfigures his face when he is cross more than anyone's, and the back view of him is almost worse than the front. His shoulders get so humped up, and his whole figure is stiff with cross-grained obstinacy.

"I shall never hold out if he speaks as ungraciously as he looks," thought I in despair. "But I'll not give in till I can hold out no longer."

"Philip!" I said. He turned round, and his face was no prettier to look at than his shoulders.

"What do you want?" (in the costermonger tone.)

"I want you to come back, Philip"—(here I choked).

"I dare say," he sneered, "and you want the properties! But you've got your play, and your amiable Charles, and your talented Alice, and your ubiquitous Bobby. And the audience will be entertained with an unexpected after-piece entitled—'The disobliging disobliged.'"

Oh it *was* hard! I think if I had looked at Philip's face I must have broken down, but I kept my eyes steadily on the crimson sun, which loomed large through the marsh mists that lay upon the horizon, as I answered with justifiable vehemence:

"I have a very bad temper, Philip" (I checked the disposition to add—"and so have you"), "but I never tell a lie. I have *not* come after the properties. The only reason for which I have come is to try and make peace." At this point I gathered up all my strength and hurried on, staring at the sun till the bushes near us and the level waste of marsh beyond seemed to vanish in the glow. "I came to say that I am sorry for my share of the quarrel. I lost my temper, and I beg your pardon for that. I was not very obliging about Mr. Clinton, but you had tried me very much. However, what you did wrong, does not excuse me, I know, and if you like to come back, I'll make a new part as you wanted. I can't give him Charles's part, or the feather, but anything I can do, or give up of my own, I will. It's not because of to-night, for you know as well as I do that I do not care twopence what happens when I'm angry, and, after all, we can only say that you've taken the things. But I wanted us to get through these holidays without quarrelling, and I wanted you to enjoy them, and I want to try and be good to you, for you are my twin brother, and for my share of the quarrel I beg your pardon—I can do no more."

Some of this speech had been about as pleasant to say as eating cinders, and when it was done I felt a sudden sensation (very rare with me) of unendurable fatigue. As the last words left my lips the sun set, but my eyes were so bedazzled that I am not sure that I should not have fallen, but for an unexpected support. What Philip had been thinking of during my speech I

do not know, for I had avoided looking at him, but when it was done he threw the

"*You ill-tempered!*" he roared. "*You've the temper of an angel, or you would never*



"'Philip,' I said. He turned round, and his face was no prettier to look at than his shoulders." (Page 87.)

properties out of his arms, and flung them around me with the hug of a Polar bear.

have come after me like this. Isobel, I am a brute, I have behaved like a brute all the week, and I beg *your* pardon."

I retract my wishes about crying, for when I do begin, I cry in such a very disagreeable way—no spring shower, but a perfect tempest of tears. Philip's unexpected generosity upset me, and I sobbed till I frightened him, and he said I was hysterical. The absurdity of this idea set me off into fits of laughing, which, oddly enough, seemed to distress him so much that I stopped at last, and found breath to say, "Then you'll come home?"

"If you'll have me. And never mind about Clinton, I'll get out of it. The truth is, Isobel, you and Alice did snub him from the first, and that vexed me; but I *am* disappointed in him. He does brag so, and I've had to take that fowling-piece to the gunsmith's already, so I know what it's worth. I did give Clinton a hint about it, and—would you believe it?—he laughed, and said he thought he had got the best of *that* bargain. I said, 'I hope you have, if it isn't an even one, for I should be very sorry to think I had cheated a friend!' But he either did not or wouldn't see it. He's a second-rate sort of fellow, I'm sure, and I'm sorry I promised to let him act. But I'll get out of it, you shan't be bothered by him."

"No, no," said I, "if you promised I'd much rather. It won't bother me at all."

(It is certainly a much pleasanter kind of dispute when the struggle is to give, and not to take!)

"You can't fit him in now?" said Philip doubtfully.

"Oh yes, I can." I felt sure that I could. I have often been short of temper for our amusements, but never of ideas. Philip tucked the properties under one arm, and me under the other, and as we ran homewards over the marsh, I threaded Mr. Clinton into the plot with perfect ease.

"We'll have a second Prince, and he shall have an enchanted shield, which

shall protect him from you—though he can't kill you—for Charles must do that. He shall be in love with the Princess too, but just when he and Charles are going to fight for her, the Fairy Godmother shall sprinkle him with the Waters of Memory, and break a spell which had made him forget his own Princess in a distant land. You know, Philip, if he *does* act well, he may make a capital part of it. It will be a splendid scene. We have two real metal swords, and as they are flashing in the air—enter the Fairy with the carved claret jug. When he is sprinkled he must drop his sword, and put his hands to his head. He will recall the picture of his own Princess, and draw it out and kiss it (I can lend him my locket miniature of great-grandpapa). Charles and he must swear eternal friendship, and then he will pick up his sword, and exit right centre, waving the golden shield, to find his Princess. It will look very well, and as he goes out the Princess can enter left in distraction about the combat, and she and Charles can fall in each other's arms, and be blessed by the Fairy."

"Capital!" said Philip. "What a head you have! But you're out of breath? We're running too fast."

"Not a bit," said I, "it refreshes me. Do you remember when you and I used to run hand in hand from the top to the bottom of Breakneck Hill? Oh, Philip, I do wish we could never quarrel any more! I think we might keep our tempers if we tried."

"*You* might," said Philip, "because you are good. But I shall always be a brute."

(Just what I said to Aunt Isobel! Must everyone learn his own lessons for himself? I had a sort of unreasonable feeling that my experience ought to serve for the rest of our ill-tempered family into the bargain.)

Philip's spirits rose higher and higher. Of course he was delighted to be out of the scrape. I am sure he was glad to be friendly again, and he was hotter than ever for the theatricals.

So was I. I felt certain that they would be successful now. But far above and beyond the comfort of things "coming right," and the pleasure of anticipated fun, my heart was rocked to a higher peace. In my small religious experiences I had never known this triumph, this thankfulness before. Circumstances, not self-control, had helped me out of previous quarrels; I had never really done battle, and gained a conquest over my besetting sin. Now, however imperfectly and awkwardly, I yet *had* fought. If Philip had been less generous I might have failed, but the effort had been real—and it had been successful. Henceforth my soul should fight with the prestige of victory, with the courage that comes of having striven and won, trusted and not been confounded.

The first person we met after we got in was Aunt Isobel. She had arrived in our absence. No doubt she had heard the whole affair, but she is very good, and never *gauche*, and she only said—

"Here come the stage-managers! Now what can I do to help? I have had some tea, and am ready to obey orders till the curtain rings up."

Boys do not carry things off well. Philip got very red, but I said—"Oh, please come to the nursery, Aunt Isobel. There are lots of things to do." She came, and was invaluable. I never said anything about the row to her, and she never said anything to me. That is what I call a friend!

The first thing Philip did was to unlock the property-box in his room and bring the Dragon and things back. The second thing he did was to mend the new scene

by replacing the bit he had cut out, glueing canvas on behind it, and touching up with paint where it joined.

We soon put straight what had been disarranged. Blinds were drawn, candles lighted, seats fixed, and the theatre began to look like itself. Aunt Isobel and I were bringing in the footlights, when we saw Bobby at the extreme right of the stage wrapped in his cloak, and contemplating, with apparent satisfaction, twelve old hats and six pasteboard bandboxes which were spread before him.

"My dear Bobby, what are these?" said Aunt Isobel. Bobby hastily—almost stammeringly—explained.

"I am Twelve Travellers, you know, Aunt Isobel."

"Dear me!" said Aunt Isobel.

"I'll show you how I am going to do it," said Bobby.

"Here are twelve old hats—I have had such work to collect them!—and six bandboxes."

"Only six?" said Aunt Isobel with commendable gravity.

"But there are the lids," said Bobby, "six of them, and six boxes, make twelve, you know. I've only one cloak, but it's red on one side and blue on the other, and two kinds of buttons. Well; I come on left for the First Traveller, with my cloak the red side out, and this white chimney-pot hat."

"Ah!" said Aunt Isobel.

"And one of the bandboxes under my cloak. The Dragon attacks me in the centre, and drives me off the right, where I smash up the bandbox, which sounds like him crunching my bones. Then I roll the thunder, turn my cloak to the blue side, put on this wideawake, and come on again with a bandbox lid and crunch that, and roll more thunder, and so on. I'm the Faithful Attendant and the Bereaved Father as well," added Bobby, with justi-

fiable pride, "and I would have done the Dragon if they would have let me."

But even Bobby did not outdo the rest of us in willingness. Alice's efforts were obvious tokens of remorse; she waited on Philip, was attentive to Mr. Clinton (who, I think, to this day believes that he made himself especially acceptable to "the young ladies") and surpassed herself on the stage. Charles does not "come round" so quickly, but at the last moment he came and offered to yield the white plume. I confess I was rather vexed with Mr. Clinton for accepting it, but Alice and I despoiled our best hats of their black ostrich feathers to make it up to Charles, and he said, with some dignity, that he should never have offered the white one if he had not meant it to be accepted.

One thing took us by surprise. We had had more trouble over the dressing of the new Prince than the costumes and make-up of all the rest of the characters together cost—he was only just torn from the big looking-glass by his "call" to the stage, and, to our amazement, he seemed decidedly unwilling to go on.

"It's a very odd thing, Miss Alice," said he in accents so pitiable that I did not wonder that Alice did her best to encourage him,—“it's a most extraordinary thing, but I feel quite nervous."

"You'll be all right when you're once on," said Alice; "mind you don't forget that it depends on you to explain that it's an invincible shield."

"Which arm had I better wear it on?" said Mr. Clinton, shifting it nervously from side to side.

"The left, the left!" cried Alice. "Now you ought to be on."

"Oh what shall I say?" cried our new hero.

"Say—'Devastating Monster! my arm is mortal, and my sword was forged by

human fingers, but this shield is invincible as——'"

"Second Prince," called Charles impatiently, and Mr. Clinton was hustled on.

He was greeted with loud applause. He said afterwards that this put his part out of his head, that Alice had told him wrong, and that the shield was too small for him.

As a matter of fact he hammered and stammered and got himself and the piece into such confusion, that Philip lost patience as he lay awaiting his cue. With a fierce bellow he emerged from his cask, and roaring, "Avaunt, knight of the invincible shield and craven heart!" he crossed the stage with the full clatter of his canvas joints, and chased Mr. Clinton off at the left centre.

Once behind the scenes, he refused to go on again. He said that he had never played without a proper part at his uncle's in Dublin, and thought our plan quite a mistake. Besides which, he had got toothache, and preferred to join the audience, which he did, and the play went on without him.

I was acting as stage-manager in the intervals of my part, when I noticed Mr. Clinton (not the ex-Prince, but his father, the surgeon) get up, and hastily leave his place among the spectators. But just as I was wondering at this, I was recalled to business by delay on the part of Bobby, who ought to have been on (with the lights down) as the Twelfth Traveller.

I found him at the left wing, with all the twelve hats fitted one over another, the whole pile resting on a chair.

"Bob, what are you after? You ought to be on."

"All right," said Bob, "Philip knows. He's lashing his tail and doing some business till I'm ready. Help me to put this cushion under my cloak for a hump-

back, will you? I didn't like the twelfth hat, it's too like the third one, so I'm going on as a Jew Pedlar. Give me that box. Now!" And before I could speak a roar of applause had greeted Bobby as he limped on in his twelve hats, crying, "Oh tear, oh tear! dish ish the tarkest night I ever shaw."

But either we acted unusually well, or our audience was exceptionally kind, for it applauded everything and everybody till the curtain fell.

"Behind the scenes" is always a place of confusion after amateur theatricals; at least it used to be with us. We ran hither and thither, lost our every-day shoes, washed the paint from our faces, and mislaid any number of towels, and combs, and brushes, ate supper by snatches, congratulated ourselves on a successful evening, and were kissed all around by Granny, who came behind the scenes for the purpose.

All was over, and the guests were gone, when I gave an invitation to the others to come and make lemon-brew over my bedroom fire as an appropriate concluding festivity. (It had been suggested by Bobby.) I had not seen Philip for some time, but we were all astonished to hear that he had gone out. We kept his "brew" hot for him, and Charles and Bobby were both nodding—though they stoutly refused to go to bed,—when his step sounded in the corridor, and he knocked and came hastily in.

Everybody roused up.

"Oh, Philip, we've been wondering where you were! Here's your brew, and we've each kept a little drop, to drink your good health."

("Mine is *all* pips," observed Bobby as a parenthesis.) But Philip was evidently thinking of something else.

"Isobel," he said, standing by the table, as if he were making a speech, "I shall never forget your coming after me to-day. I told you you had the temper of an angel."

"So did I," said Alice.

"Hear! hear!" said Bobby, who was sucking his pips one by one and laying them by—"to plant in a pot," as he afterwards explained.

"You not only saved the theatricals," continued Philip, "you saved my life I believe."

No "situation" in the play had been half so startling as this. We remained open-mouthed and silent, whilst Philip sat down as if he were tired, and rested his head on his hands, which were dirty, and stained with something red.

"Haven't you heard about the accident?" he asked.

We all said "No."

"The 4.15 ran into the express where the lines cross, you know. Isobel, *there were only two first-class carriages, and everybody in them was killed but one man.* They have taken both his legs off, and he's not expected to live. Oh, poor fellow, he did groan so!"

Bobby burst into passionate tears, and Philip buried his head on his arms.

Neither Alice nor I could speak, but Charles got up and went round and stood by Philip.

"You've been helping," he said emphatically, "I know you have. You're a good fellow, Philip, and I beg your pardon for saucing you. I am going to forget about the football too. I was going to have eaten raw meat, and dumb-belled, to make myself strong enough to thrash you," added Charles remorsefully.

"Eat a butcher's shop full, if you like," replied Philip with contempt. And I think it showed that Charles was begin-

ning to practise forbearance, that he made no reply.

Some years have passed since those Twelfth Night theatricals. The Dragon has long been dissolved into his component scales, and we never have impromptu performances now. The passing fame which a terrible railway accident gave to our insignificant station has also faded. But it set a seal on our good resolutions which I may honestly say has not been lightly broken.

There, on the very spot where I had almost resolved never to forgive Philip, never to try to heal the miserable wounds of the family peace, I learned the news of the accident in which he might have been killed. Philip says that if anything could make him behave better to me it is the

thought that I saved his life, as he calls it. But if anything could help me to be good to him, surely it must be the remembrance of how nearly I did not save him.

I put Alice on an equality in our bedroom that night, and gave her part-ownership of the text and the picture. We are very happy together.

We have all tried to improve, and I think I may say we have been fairly successful.

More than once I have heard (one does hear many things people say behind one's back) that new acquaintances—people who have only known us lately—have expressed astonishment, not unmixed with a generous indignation, on hearing that we were ever described by our friends as—A VERY ILL-TEMPERED FAMILY.

OUR FIELD.

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind,
In the primal sympathy
Which, having been, must ever be.

* * * * *
And, O ye fountains, meadows, hills, and groves,
Think not of any severing of our loves !
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might ;

* * * * *
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears :
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that too often lie too deep for tears.

Wordsworth.

OUR FIELD.

THERE were four of us, and three of us had godfathers and godmothers. Three each. Three times three make nine, and not a fairy godmother in the lot. That was what vexed us.

It was very provoking, because we knew so well what we wanted if we had one, and she had given us three wishes each. Three times three make nine. We could have got all we wanted out of nine wishes, and have provided for Perronet into the bargain. It would not have been any good Perronet having wishes all to himself, because he was only a dog.

We never knew who it was that drowned Perronet, but it was Sandy who saved his life and brought him home. It was when he was coming home from school, and he brought Perronet with him. Perronet was not at all nice to look at when we first saw him, though we were very sorry for him. He was wet all over, and his eyes shut, and you could see his ribs, and he looked quite dark and sticky. But when he dried, he dried a lovely yellow, with two black ears like velvet. People sometimes asked us what kind of dog he was, but we never knew, except that he was the nicest possible kind.

When we had got him, we were afraid we were not going to be allowed to have him. Mother said we could not afford him, because of the tax and his keep. The

tax was five shillings, but there wanted nearly a year to the time of paying it. Of course his keep began as soon as he could eat, and that was the very same evening. We were all very miserable, because we were so fond of Perronet—at least, Perronet was not his name then, but he was the same person—and at last it was settled that all three of us would give up sugar, towards saving the expense of his keep, if he might stay. It was hardest for Sandy, because he was particularly fond of sweet things; but then he was particularly fond of Perronet. So we all gave up sugar, and Perronet was allowed to remain.

About the tax, we thought we could save any pennies or half-pennies we got during the year, and it was such a long time to the time for paying, that we should be almost sure to have enough by then. We had not any money at the time, or we should have bought a savings-box; but lots of people save their money in stockings, and we settled that we would. An old stocking would not do, because of the holes, and I had not many good pairs; but we took one of my winter ones to use in the summer, and then we thought we could pour the money into one of my good summer ones when the winter came.

What we most of all wanted a fairy godmother for was about our "homes."

There was no kind of play we liked better than playing at houses and new homes. But no matter where we made our "home," it was sure to be disturbed. If it was indoors, and we made a palace under the big table, as soon as ever we had got it nicely divided into rooms according to where the legs came, it was certain to be dinner-time, and people put their feet into it. The nicest house we ever had was in the out-house ; we had it, and kept it quite a secret, for weeks.

It was always the same. If we wanted to play at Thames Tunnel under the beds, we were not allowed ; and the day we did Aladdin in the store-closet, old Jane came and would put away the soap, just when Aladdin could not possibly have got the door of the cave open.

It was one day early in May—a very hot day for the time of year, which had made us rather cross—when Sandy came in about four o'clock, smiling more broadly even than usual, and said to



And then the new load of wood came and covered up everything, our best oyster-shell dinner-service and all.

Anyone can see that it is impossible really to fancy anything when you are constantly interrupted. You can't have any fun out of a railway train stopping at stations, when they take all your carriages to pieces because the chairs are wanted for tea ; any more than you can play properly at Grace Darling in a life-boat, when they say the old cradle is too good to be knocked about in that way.

Richard and me, "I've got a fairy god-mother, and she's given us a field."

Sandy was very fond of eating, especially sweet things. He used to keep back things from meals to enjoy afterwards, and he almost always had a piece of cake in his pocket. He brought a piece out now, and took a large mouthful, laughing at us with his eyes over the top of it.

"What's the good of a field?" said Richard.

"Splendid houses in it," said Sandy.

"I'm quite tired of fancying homes,"

said I. "It's no good; we always get turned out."

"It's quite a new place," Sandy continued; "you've never been there," and he took a triumphant bite of the cake.

"How did you get there?" asked Richard.

"The fairy godmother showed me," was Sandy's reply.

There is such a thing as nursery honour. We respected each other's pretensions unless we were very cross, but I didn't disbelieve in his fairy godmother. I only said, "You shouldn't talk with your mouth full," to snub him for making a secret about his field.

Sandy is very good-tempered. He only laughed and said, "Come along. It's much cooler out now. The sun's going down."

He took us along Gipsy Lane. We had been there once or twice, for walks, but not very often, for there was some horrid story about it which rather frightened us. I do not know what it was, but it was a horrid one. Still we had been there, and I knew it quite well. At the end of it there is a stile, by which you go into a field, and at the other end you get over another stile, and find yourself in the high road.

"If this is our field, Sandy," said I, when we got to the first stile, "I'm very sorry, but it really won't do. I know that lots of people come through it. We should never be quiet here."

Sandy laughed. He didn't speak, and he didn't get over the stile; he went through a gate close by it leading into a little sort of bye-lane that was all mud in winter and hard cart-ruts in summer. I had never been up it, but I had seen hay and that sort of thing go in and come out of it.

He went on and we followed him. The ruts were very disagreeable to walk on, but presently he led us through a hole

in the hedge, and we got into a field. It was a very bare-looking field, and went rather uphill. There was no path, but Sandy walked away up it, and we went after him. There was another hedge at the top, and a stile in it. It had very rough posts, one much longer than the other, and the cross step was gone, but there were two rails, and we all climbed over. And when we got to the other side, Sandy leaned against the big post and gave a wave with his right hand and said, "This is our field."

It sloped down hill, and the hedges round it were rather high, with awkward branches of blackthorn sticking out here and there without any leaves, and with the blossom lying white on the black twigs like snow. There were cowslips all over the field, but they were thicker at the lower end, which was damp. The great heat of the day was over. The sun shone still, but it shone low down and made such splendid shadows that we all walked about with grey giants at our feet; and it made the bright green of the grass, and the cowslips down below, and the top of the hedge, and Sandy's hair, and everything in the sun and the mist behind the elder bush which was out of the sun; so yellow—so very yellow—that just for a minute I really believed about Sandy's godmother, and thought it was a story come true, and that everything was turning into gold.

But it was only for a minute; of course I know that fairy tales are not true. But it was a lovely field, and when we had put our hands to our eyes and had a good look at it, I said to Sandy, "I beg your pardon, Sandy, for telling you not to talk with your mouth full. It is the best field I ever heard of."

"Sit down," said Sandy, doing the honours; and we all sat down under the hedge.

"There are violets just behind us," he continued. "Can't you smell them? But whatever you do, don't tell anybody of those, or we shan't keep our field to ourselves for a day. And look here." He had turned over on to his face, and Richard and I did the same, whilst Sandy fumbled among the bleached grass and brown leaves.

"Hyacinths," said Richard, as Sandy displayed the green tops of them.

"As thick as peas," said Sandy. This bank will be blue in a few weeks; and fiddle-heads everywhere. There will be no end of ferns. May to any extent—it's only in bud yet—and there's a wren's nest in there——" At this point he rolled suddenly over on to his back and looked up.

"A lark," he explained; "there was one singing its head off, this morning. I say, Dick, this will be a good field for a kite, won't it? *But wait a bit.*"

After every fresh thing that Sandy showed us in our field, he always finished by saying, "*Wait a bit*"; and that was because there was always something else better still.

"There's a brook at the bottom there," he said, "with lots of fresh-water shrimps. I wonder whether they would boil red. *But wait a bit.* This hedge, you see, has got a very high bank, and it's worn into kind of ledges. I think we could play at 'shops' there—*but wait a bit.*"

"It's almost *too* good, Sandy, dear!" said I, as we crossed the field to the opposite hedge.

"The best is to come," said Sandy. "I've a very good mind not to let it out till to-morrow." And to our distraction he sat down in the middle of the field, put his arms round his knees, as if we were playing at "Honey-pots," and rocked himself backwards and forwards with a face of brimming satisfaction.

Neither Richard nor I would have

been so mean as to explore on our own account, when the field was Sandy's discovery, but we tried hard to persuade him to show us everything.

He had the most provoking way of laughing and holding his tongue, and he did that now, besides slowly turning all his pockets inside-out into his hands, and mumbling up the crumbs and odd currants, saying, "Guess!" between every mouthful.

But when there was not a crumb left in the seams of his pockets, Sandy turned them back, and jumping up, said—"One can only tell a secret once. It's a hollow oak. Come along!"

He ran and we ran, to the other side of Our Field. I had read of hollow oaks, and seen pictures of them, and once I dreamed of one, with a witch inside, but we had never had one to play in. We were nearly wild with delight. It looked all solid from the field, but when we pushed behind, on the hedge side, there was the door, and I crept in, and it smelt of wood, and delicious damp. There could not be a more perfect castle, and though there were no windows in the sides, the light came in from the top, where the polypody hung over like a fringe. Sandy was quite right. It was the very best thing in Our Field.

Perronet was as fond of the field as we were. What he liked were the little birds. At least, I don't know that he liked them, but they were what he chiefly attended to. I think he knew that it was our field, and thought he was the watch-dog of it, and whenever a bird settled down anywhere, he barked at it, and then it flew away, and he ran barking after it till he lost it; and by that time another had settled down, and then Perronet flew at him, and so on, all up and down the hedge. He never caught a bird, and never would let one sit down, if he could see it.

We had all kinds of games in Our Field. Shops—for there were quantities of things to sell—and sometimes I was a moss-merchant, for there were ten different kinds of moss by the brook, and sometimes I was a jeweller, and sold daisy-chains and pebbles, and coral sets made of holly berries, and oak-apple necklaces; and

and paid for them with money made of elder-pith, sliced into rounds. The first shop I kept was to sell cowslips, and Richard and Sandy lived by the brook, and were wine merchants, and made cowslip wine in a tin mug.

The elder-tree was a beauty. In July the cream-coloured flowers were so sweet,



sometimes I kept provisions, like earth-nuts, and mallow-cheeses, and mushrooms; and sometimes I kept a flower-shop, and sold nosegays and wreaths, and umbrellas made of rushes. I liked that kind of shop, because I am fond of arranging flowers, and I always make our birthday wreaths. And sometimes I kept a whole lot of shops, and Richard and Sandy bought my things,

we could hardly sit under it, and in the autumn it was covered with berries; but we were always a little disappointed that they never tasted in the least like elder-berry syrup. Richard used to make flutes out of the stalks, and one really did to play tunes on, but it always made Perronet bark.

Richard's every-day cap had a large hole

in the top, and when we were in Our Field we always hung it on the top of the tallest of the two stile-posts, to show that we were there; just as the Queen has a flag hung out at Windsor Castle, when she is at home.

We played at castles and houses, and when we were tired of the houses, we pretended to pack up, and went to the seaside for change of air by the brook. Sandy and I took off our shoes and stockings and were bathing-women, and we bathed Perronet; and Richard sat on the bank and was a "tripper," looking at us through a telescope; for when the elder-stems cracked and wouldn't do for flutes, he made them into telescopes. And before we went down to the brook we made jam of hips and haws from the hedge at the top of the field, and put it into acorn cups, and took it with us, that the children might not be short of roly-polies at the seaside.

Whatever we played at we were never disturbed. Birds, and cows, and men and horses ploughing in the distance, do not disturb you at all.

We were very happy that summer: the boys were quite happy, and the only thing that vexed me was thinking of Perronet's tax-money. For months and months went on and we did not save it. Once we got as far as twopence halfpenny, and then one day Richard came to me and said, "I must have some more string for the kite. You might lend me a penny out of Perronet's stocking, till I get some money of my own."

So I did; and the next day Sandy came and said, "You lent Dick one of Perronet's coppers; I'm sure Perronet would lend me one," and then they said it was ridiculous to leave a halfpenny there by itself, so we spent it in acid drops.

It worried me so much at last, that I began to dream horrible dreams about

Perronet having to go away because we hadn't saved his tax-money. And then I used to wake up and cry, till the pillow was so wet, I had to turn it. The boys never seemed to mind, but then boys don't think about things; so that I was quite surprised when one day I found Sandy alone in our field with Perronet in his arms, crying, and feeding him with cake; and I found he was crying about the tax-money.

I cannot bear to see boys cry. I would much rather cry myself, and I begged Sandy to leave off, for I said I was quite determined to try and think of something.

It certainly was remarkable that the very next day should be the day when we heard about the flower-show.

It was in school—the village school, for mother could not afford to send us anywhere else—and the schoolmaster rapped on his desk and said, "Silence, children!" and that at the agricultural show there was to be a flower show this year, and that an old gentleman was going to give prizes to the school-children for window-plants and for the best arranged wild flowers. There were to be nosegays and wreaths, and there was to be a first prize of five shillings, and a second prize of half-a-crown, for the best collection of wild flowers with the names put to them.

"The English names," said the schoolmaster; "and there may be—silence, children!—there may be collections of ferns, or grasses, or mosses to compete, too, for the gentleman wishes to encourage a taste for natural history."

And several of the village children said, "What's that?" and I squeezed Sandy's arm, who was sitting next to me, and whispered, "Five shillings!" and the schoolmaster said, "Silence, children!" and I thought I never should have finished my lessons that day for thinking of Perronet's tax-money.

July is not at all a good month for wild flowers; May and June are far better. However, the show was to be in the first week in July.

I said to the boys, "Look here: I'll do a collection of flowers. I know the names, and I can print. It's no good two or three people muddling with arranging flowers; but if you will get me what I want, I shall be very much obliged. If either of you will make another collection, you know there are ten kinds of mosses by the brook; and we have names for them of our own, and they are English. Perhaps they'll do. But everything must come out of Our Field."

The boys agreed, and they were very good. Richard made me a box, rather high at the back. We put sand at the bottom and damped it, and then Feather Moss, lovely clumps of it, and into that I stuck the flowers. They all came out of Our Field. I like to see grass with flowers, and we had very pretty grasses, and between every bunch of flowers I put a bunch of grass of different kinds. I got all the flowers and all the grasses ready first, and printed the names on pieces of cardboard to stick in with them, and then I arranged them by my eye, and Sandy handed me what I called for, for Richard was busy at the brook making a tray of mosses.

Sandy knew the flowers and the names of them quite as well as I did, of course; we knew everything that lived in Our Field; so when I called, "Ox-eye daisies, cock's-foot grass, labels; meadow-sweet, fox-tail grass, labels; dog-roses, shivering grass, labels;" and so on, he gave me the right things, and I had nothing to do but to put the colours that looked best together next to each other, and to make the grass look light, and pull up bits of the moss to show well. And at the very end I put in a label, "All out of Our Field."

I did not like it when it was done; but

Richard praised it so much, it cheered me up, and I thought his mosses looked lovely.

The flower-show day was very hot. I did not think it could be hotter anywhere in the world than it was in the field where the show was; but it was hotter in the tent.

We should never have got in at all—for you had to pay at the gate—but they let competitors in free, though not at first. When we got in, there were a lot of grown-up people, and it was very hard work getting along among them, and getting to see the stands with the things on. We kept seeing tickets with "1st Prize" and "2nd Prize," and struggling up; but they were sure to be dahlias in a tray, or fruit that you mightn't eat, or vegetables. The vegetables disappointed us so often, I got to hate them. I don't think I shall ever like very big potatoes (before they are boiled) again, particularly the red ones. It makes me feel sick with heat and anxiety to think of them.

We had struggled slowly all round the tent, and seen all the cucumbers, onions, lettuces, long potatoes, round potatoes, and everything else, when we saw an old gentleman, with spectacles and white hair, standing with two or three ladies. And then we saw three nosegays in jugs, with all the green picked off, and the flowers tied as tightly together as they would go, and then we saw some prettier ones, and then we saw my collection, and it had got a big label in it marked "1st Prize," and next to it came Richard's moss-tray, with the Hair-moss, and the Pincushion-moss, and the Scale-mosses, and a lot of others with names of our own, and it was marked "2nd Prize." And I gripped one of Sandy's arms just as Richard seized the other, and we both cried, "Perronet is paid for!"

* * * * *

There was two-and-sixpence over. We never had such a feast ! It was a picnic tea, and we had it in Our Field. I thought Sandy and Perronet would have died of cake, but they were none the worse.

We were very much frightened at first when the old gentleman invited himself ; but he would come, and he brought a lot of nuts, and he did get inside the oak, though it is really too small for him.

I don't think there ever was anybody so kind. If he were not a man, I should really and truly believe in Sandy's fairy godmother.

Of course I don't really believe in fairies. I am not so young as that. And I know that Our Field does not exactly belong to us.

I wonder to whom it does belong ? Richard says he believes it belongs to the gentleman who lives at the big red house among the trees. But he must be wrong ; for we see that gentleman at church every Sunday, but we never saw him in Our Field.

And I don't believe anybody could have such a field of their very own, and never come to see it, from one end of Summer to the other.

MADAM LIBERALITY.

"Like little body with a mighty heart."

King Henry V., Act 2.

MADAM LIBERALITY.



PART I.

It was not her real name: it was given to her by her brothers and sister. People with very marked qualities of character do sometimes get such distinctive titles, to rectify the indefiniteness of those they inherit and those they receive in baptism. The ruling peculiarity of a character is apt to show itself early in life, and it showed itself in Madam Liberty when she was a little child.

Plum-cakes were not plentiful in her home when Madam Liberty was young, and such as there were, were of the "wholesome" kind—plenty of bread-stuff, and the currants and raisins at a respectful distance from each other. But few as the plums were, she seldom ate them. She picked them out very carefully, and put them into a box, which was hidden under her pinafore.

When we grown-up people were children, and plum-cake and plum-pudding tasted very much nicer than they do now, we also picked out the plums. Some of us ate them at once, and had then to toil slowly through the cake or pudding, and some valiantly despatched the plainer portion of the feast at the beginning, and kept the plums to sweeten the end. Sooner or later we ate them ourselves, but

Madam Liberty kept her plums for other people.

When the vulgar meal was over—that commonplace refreshment ordained and superintended by the elders of the household—Madam Liberty would withdraw into a corner, from which she issued notes of invitation to all the dolls. They were "fancy written" on curl papers and folded into cocked hats.

Then began the real feast. The dolls came, and the children with them. Madam Liberty had no toy tea-sets or dinner-sets, but there were acorn-cups filled to the brim, and the water tasted deliciously, though it came out of the ewer in the night nursery, and had not even been filtered. And before every doll was a flat oyster-shell covered with a round oyster-shell, a complete set of complete pairs, which had been collected by degrees, like old family plate. And when the upper shell was raised, on every dish lay a plum. It was then that Madam Liberty got her sweetness out of the cake.

She was in her glory at the head of the inverted tea-chest; and if the raisins would not go round, the empty oyster-shell was hers, and nothing offended her more than to have this noticed. That was her spirit,

then and always. She could "do without" anything, if the wherewithal to be hospitable was left to her.

When one's brain is no stronger than mine is, one gets very much confused in disentangling motives and nice points of character. I have doubted whether Madam Liberty's besetting virtue were a virtue at all. Was it unselfishness or love of approbation, benevolence or fussiness, the gift of sympathy or the lust of power? Or was it something else? She was a very sickly child, with much pain to bear, and many pleasures to forego. Was it, as doctors say, "an effort of nature," to make her live outside herself and be happy in the happiness of others?

Equal doubt may hang over the conduct of her brothers and sister towards her. Did they more love her, or find her useful? Was their gratitude—as gratitude has been defined to be—"a keen sense of favours to come"? They certainly got used to her services, and to begging and borrowing the few things that were her "very own," without fear of refusal. But if they rather took her benevolence for granted, and thought that she "liked lending her things," and that it was her way of enjoying possessions, they may have been right; for next to one's own soul, one's own family is perhaps the best judge of one's temper and disposition.

And they called her Madam Liberty, so Madam Liberty she shall remain.

It has been hinted that there was a reason for the scarceness of the plums in the plum-cake. Madam Liberty's father was dead, and her mother was very poor, and had several children. It was not an easy matter with her to find bread for the family, putting currants and raisins out of the question.

Though poor, they were, however, gentle-folk, and had, for that matter, rich relations. Very rich relations indeed! Madam

Liberty's mother's first cousin had fifteen thousand a year. His servants did not spend ten thousand. (As to what he spent himself, it was comparatively trifling.) The rest of the money accumulated. Not that it was being got together to do something with by-and-by. He had no intention of ever spending more than he spent at present. Indeed, with a lump of coal taken off here, and a needless candle blown out there, he rather hoped in future to spend less.

His wife was Madam Liberty's god-mother. She was a good-hearted woman, and took real pleasure in being kind to people, in the way she thought best for them. Sometimes it was a graceful and appropriate way, and very often it was not. The most acceptable act of kindness she ever did to her god-daughter was when the child was recovering from an illness, and she asked her to visit her at the seaside.

Madam Liberty had never seen the sea, and the thought of it proved a better stimulus than the port wine which her doctor ordered so easily, and her mother got with such difficulty.

When new clothes were bought, or old ones refurbished, Madam Liberty, as a rule, went to the wall. Not because her mother was ever guilty of favouritism, but because such occasions afforded an opportunity of displaying generosity towards her younger sister.

But this time it was otherwise; for whatever could be spared towards "summer things" for the two little girls was spent upon Madam Liberty's outfit for the seaside. There was a new dress, and a jacket "as good as new," for it was cut out of "mother's" cloth cloak and made up, with the best binding and buttons in the shop, by the village tailor. And he was bribed, in a secret visit, and with much coaxing from the little girls, to make real

pockets instead of braided shams. The *second best* frock was compounded of two which had hitherto been *very bests*—Madam Liberty's own, eked out by "Darling's" into a more fashionable fullness, and with a cape to match.

There was a sense of solid property to be derived from being able to take in at a glance the stock of well-mended under-garments, half of which were generally at the wash. Besides, they had been added to, and all the stockings were darned, and only one pair in the legs where it would show, below short petticoat mark.

Then there was a bonnet newly turned and trimmed, and a pair and a half of new boots, for surely boots are at least half new when they have been (as the village cobbler described it in his bill) "souled and healed?"

Poor little Madam Liberty! When she saw the things which covered her bed in their abundance, it seemed to her an outfit for a princess. And yet when her godmother asked Podmore, the lady's maid, "How is the child off for clothes?" Podmore unhesitatingly replied, "She've nothing fit to be seen, ma'am," which shows how differently the same things appear in different circumstances.

Podmore was a good friend to Madam Liberty. She had that open-handed spirit which one acquires quite naturally in a house where everything goes on on a large scale, at somebody else's expense. Now Madam Liberty's godmother, from the very largeness of her possessions, was obliged to leave the care of them to others, in such matters as food, dress, the gardens, the stables, etc. So, like many other people in a similar case, she amused herself and exercised her economical instincts by troublesome little thriftinesses, by making cheap presents, dear bargains, and so forth. She was by nature a managing

woman; and when those very grand people, the butler, the housekeeper, the head-gardener, and the lady's maid had divided her household duties among them, there was nothing left for her to be clever about, except such little matters as joining the rag-ends of the bronze sealing-wax sticks which lay in the silver inkstand on the malachite writing-table, and being good-natured at the cheapest rate at which her friends could be benefited.

Madam Liberty's best neckerchief had been very pretty when it was new, and would have been pretty as well as clean still if the washerwoman had not used rather too hot an iron to it, so that the blue in the check pattern was somewhat faded. And yet it had felt very smart as Madam Liberty drove in the carrier's cart to meet the coach at the outset of her journey. But when she sat against the rich blue leather of her godmother's coach as they drove up and down the esplanade, it was like looking at fairy jewels by daylight when they turn into faded leaves.

"Is that your best neckerchief, child?" said the old lady.

"Yes, ma'am," blushed Madam Liberty.

So when they get home her godmother went to her odds-and-ends drawer.

Podmore never interfered with this drawer. She was content to be despotic among the dresses, and left the old lady to fiddle to her heart's content with bits of old lace and ribbon which she herself would not have condescended to wear.

The old lady fumbled them over. There were a good many half-yards of ribbon with very large patterns, but nothing really fit for Madam Liberty's little neck but a small Indian scarf of many-coloured silk. It was old, and Podmore would never have allowed her mistress to drive on the esplanade in anything so small and

youthful-looking; but the colours were quite bright, and there was no doubt but that Madam Liberty might be provided for by a cheaper neck-ribbon. So the old lady shut the drawer, and toddled down the corridor that led to Podmore's room.

She had a good general idea that Podmore's perquisites were large, but perquisites seem to be a condition of valuable servants in large establishments, and then anything which could be recovered from what had already passed into Podmore's room must be a kind of economy. So she resolved that Podmore should "find something" for Madam Liberty's neck.

"I never noticed it, ma'am, till I brought your shawl to the carriage," said Podmore. "If I had seen it before, the young lady shouldn't have come with you so. I'll see to it, ma'am."

"Thank you, Podmore."

"Can you spare me to go into the town this afternoon, ma'am?" added the lady's maid. "I want some things at Huckaback and Woolsey's."

Huckaback and Woolsey were the linendrapers where Madam Liberty's godmother "had an account." It was one of the things on a large scale over the details of which she had no control.

"You'll be back in time to dress me?"

"Oh dear, yes, ma'am." And having settled the old lady's shawl on her shoulders, and drawn out her cap-lappets, Podmore returned to her work.

It was a work of kindness. The old lady might deal shabbily with her faded ribbons and her relations, but the butler, the housekeeper, and the lady's maid did their best to keep up the credit of the family.

It was well known that Madam Liberty was a cousin, and Podmore resolved

that she should have a proper frock to go down to dessert in.

— So she had been very busy making a little slip out of a few yards of blue silk which had been over and above one of the old lady's dresses, and now she betook herself to the draper's to get spotted muslin to cover it and ribbons to trim it with.

And whilst Madam Liberty's godmother was still feeling a few twinges about the Indian scarf, Podmore ordered a pink neckerchief shot with white, and with pink and white fringes, to be included in the parcel.

But it was not in this way alone that Podmore was a good friend to Madam Liberty.

She took her out walking, and let her play on the beach, and even bring home dirty weeds and shells. Indeed, Podmore herself was not above collecting cowries in a pill-box for her little nephews.

When Mrs. Podmore met acquaintances on the beach, Madam Liberty played alone, and these were her happiest moments. She played amongst the rotting, weed-grown stakes of an old pier, and "fancied" rooms among them—suites of rooms in which she would lodge her brothers and sisters if they came to visit her, and where—with cockle-shells for teacups, and lava for vegetables, and fucus-pods for fish—they should find themselves as much enchanted as Beauty in the palace of the Beast.

Again and again she "fancied" Darling into her shore-palace, the delights of which should only be marred by the growls which she herself would utter from time to time from behind the stakes, in the character of a sea-beast, and which should but enhance the moment when she would rush out and throw her arms round Darling's neck and reveal herself as Madam Liberty.

"Darling" was the pet name of Madam Liberty's sister—her only sister, on whom she lavished the intensest affection of a heart which was always a large one in proportion to her little body. It seemed so strange to play at any game of fancies without Darling, that Madam Liberty could hardly realize it.

She might be preparing by herself a larger treat than usual for the others; but it was incredible that no one would come after all, and that Darling would never see the palace on the beach, and the state-rooms, and the limpets, and the sea-weed, and the salt-water soup, and the real fish (a small dab discarded from a herring-net) which Madam Liberty had got for her.

Her mind was filled with day-dreams of Darling's coming, and of how she would display to her all the wonders of the seashore, which would reflect almost as much credit upon her as if she had invented razor-shells and crabs. She thought so much about it that she began quite to expect it.

Was it not natural that her godmother should see that she must be lonely, and ask Darling to come and be with her? Perhaps the old lady had already done so, and the visit was to be a surprise. Madam Liberty could quite imagine doing a nice thing like this herself, and she hoped it so strongly that she almost came to believe in it.

Every day she waited hopefully, first for the post, and then for the time when the coach came in, the hour at which she herself had arrived; but the coach brought no Darling, and the post brought no letter to say that she was coming, and Madam Liberty's hopes were disappointed.

Madam Liberty was accustomed to disappointment.

From her earliest years it had been a

family joke that poor Madam Liberty was always in ill-luck's way.

It is true that she was constantly planning; and if one builds castles, one must expect a few loose stones about one's ears now and then. But, besides this, her little hopes were constantly being frustrated by fate.

If the pigs or the hens got into the garden, Madam Liberty's bed was sure to be laid waste before anyone came to the rescue. When a picnic or a teaparty was in store, if Madam Liberty did not catch cold, so as to hinder her from going, she was pretty sure to have a quinsy from fatigue or wet feet afterwards. When she had a treat she paid for the pleasurable excitement by a headache, just as when she ate sweet things they gave her toothache.

But if her luck was less than other people's, her courage and good spirits were more than common. She could think with pleasure about the treat when she had forgotten the headache. One side of her little face would look fairly cheerful when the other was obliterated by a flannel bag of hot camomile flowers, and the whole was redolent of every horrible domestic remedy for toothache, from oil of cloves and creosote to a baked onion in the ear. No sufferings abated her energy for fresh exploits, or quenched the hope that cold, and damp, and fatigue would not hurt her "this time."

In the intervals of wringing out hot flannels for her own quinsy, she would amuse herself by devising a desert island expedition on a larger and possibly a damper scale than hitherto, against the time when she should be out again.

It is a very old simile, but Madam Liberty really was like a cork rising on the top of the very wave of ill-luck that had swallowed up her hopes. Her little

white face and undaunted spirit bobbed up after each mischance or malady as ready and hopeful as ever.

Though her day-dream about Darling and the shore palace was constantly disappointed, this did not hinder her from indulging new hopes and fancies in another place to which she went with Podmore; a place which was filled with wonders of a different kind from the treasures of the palace on the shore.

It was called the Bazaar. It would be a very long business to say what was in it. But amongst other things there were foreign cage-birds, musical-boxes, and camp-stools, and baskets, and polished pebbles, and paper patterns, and a little ladies' and children's millinery, and a good deal of mock jewellery, and some very bad soaps and scents, and some very good children's toys.

It was Madam Liberty's godmother who first took her to the bazaar. A titled lady of her acquaintance had heard that wire flower-baskets of a certain shape could be bought in the bazaar cheaper (by twopence-halfpenny each) than in London; and after writing to her friend to ascertain the truth of the statement, she wrote again to authorize her to purchase three on her behalf. So Madam Liberty's godmother ordered out the blue carriage and pair, and drove with her little cousin to the bazaar.

And as they came out, followed by a bearded man, bowing very low, and carrying the wire baskets, Madam Liberty's godmother stopped near the toystall to button her glove. And when she had buttoned it (which took a long time, because her hands were stout, and Podmore generally did it with a hook), she said to Madam Liberty, "Now, child, I want to tell you that if you are very good whilst you are with me, and Podmore gives me a good report of you, I

will bring you here before you go home, and buy you a present."

Madam Liberty's heart danced with delight. She wished her godmother would stand by the toystall for an hour, that she might see what she most hoped the present would be. But the footman tucked them into the carriage, and the bearded man bowed himself back into the bazaar, and they drove home. Then Madam Liberty's godmother directed the butler to despatch the wire baskets to her ladyship, which he did by coach. And her ladyship's butler paid the carriage, and tipped the man who brought the parcel from the coach-office, and charged these items in his account. And her ladyship wrote a long letter of thanks to Madam Liberty's godmother for her kindness in saving her unnecessary expense.

The old lady did not go to the bazaar again for some time, but Madam Liberty went there with Podmore. She looked at the toys and wondered which of them might one day be her very own. The white china tea-service with the green rim, big enough to make real tea in, was too good to be hoped for, but there were tin tea-sets where the lids would come off, and wooden ones where they were stuck on; and there were all manner of toys that would be invaluable for all kinds of nursery games and fancies.

They helped a "fancy" of Madam Liberty even then. She used to stand by the toy-stall, and fancy that she was as rich as her godmother, and was going to give Christmas-boxes to her brothers and sisters, and her amusement was to choose, though she could not buy them.

Out of this came a deep mortification. She had been playing at this fancy one afternoon, and having rather confused herself by changing her mind about the toys, she went through her final list in an undertone, to get it clearly into her head.

The shopman was serving a lady, and Madam Liberty thought he could not hear her as she murmured, "The china tea-set, the box of beasts, the doll's furniture for Darling," etc., etc. But the shopman's hearing was very acute, and he darted forward, crying, "The china tea-set, did you say, miss?"

The blood rushed up to poor Madam Liberty's face till it seemed to choke her, and the lady, whom the shopman had been serving, said kindly, "I think the little girl said the box of beasts."

Madam Liberty hoped it was a dream, but having pinched herself, she found that it was not.

Her mother had often said to her, "When you can't think what to say, tell the truth." It was not a very easy rule, but Madam Liberty went by it.

"I don't want anything, thank you," said she; "at least, I mean I have no money to buy anything with: I was only counting the things I should like to get if I had."

And then, as the floor of the bazaar would *not* open and swallow her up, she ran away, with her red face and her empty pocket, to shelter herself with Podmore at the mock-jewellery stall, and she did not go to the bazaar any more.

Once again disappointment was in store for Madam Liberty. The end of her visit came, and her godmother's promise seemed to be forgotten. But the night before her departure, the old lady came into her room and said:

"I couldn't take you with me to-day, child, but I didn't forget my promise. Podmore says you've been very good, and so I've brought you a present: A very *useful* one, I hope," added the old lady, in a tone as if she were congratulating herself upon her good sense. "And tell Catherine—that's your mother, child—with my love, always to have you dressed

for the evening. I like to see children come in to dessert, when they have good manners—which I must say you have; besides, it keeps the nurses up to their work."

And then she drew out from its paper a little frock of pink *mousseline-de-laine*, very prettily tacked together by the young woman at the millinery-stall, and very cheap for its gay appearance.

Down came all Madam Liberty's visions in connection with the toy-stall: but she consoled herself that night with picturing Darling's delight when she gave her (as she meant to give her) the pink dress.

She had another source of comfort and anticipation—the *scallop shells*.

But this requires to be explained. The greatest prize which Madam Liberty had gained from her wanderings by the seashore was a complete scallop shell. When washed the double shell was as clean and as pretty as any china muffin-dish with a round top; and now her ambition was to get four more, and thus to have a service for doll's feasts which should far surpass the oyster shells. She was talking about this to Podmore one day when they were picking cowries together, and Podmore cried, "Why, this little girl would get you them, miss, I'll be bound!"

She was a bare-footed little girl, who sold pebbles and seaweed, and salt water for sponging with, and she had undertaken to get the scallop-shells, and had run off to pick seaweed out of a newly landed net before Madam Liberty could say "Thank you."

She heard no more of the shells, however, until the day before she went away, when the butler met her as she came indoors, and told her that the little girl was waiting. And it was not till Madam Liberty saw the scallop shells lying

clean and pink in a cotton handkerchief that she remembered that she had no money to pay for them.

Here was another occasion for painful truth-telling! But to make humiliating confession before the butler seemed almost beyond even Madam Liberty's moral courage. He went back to his pantry, however, and she pulled off her pretty pink neckerchief and said:

"I am *very* sorry, little girl, but I've got no money of my own; but if you would like this instead——" And the little girl seemed quite pleased with her bargain, and ran hastily off, as if afraid that the young lady would change her mind.

And this was how Madam Liberty got her scallop shells.

It may seem strange that Madam Liberty should ever have been accused of meanness, and yet her eldest brother did once shake his head at her and say, "You're the most meanest and *generoustest* person I ever knew!" And Madam Liberty wept over the accusation, although her brother was then too young to form either his words or his opinions correctly.

But it was the touch of truth in it which made Madam Liberty cry. To the end of their lives Tom and she were alike and yet different in this matter. Madam Liberty saved, and pinched, and planned, and then gave away, and Tom gave away without the pinching and saving. This sounds much handsomer, and it was poor Tom's misfortune that he always believed it to be so; though he gave away what did not belong to him, and fell back for the supply of his own pretty numerous wants upon other people, not forgetting Madam Liberty.

Painful experience convinced Madam Liberty in the end that his way was a

wrong one, but she had her doubts many times in her life whether there were not something unhandsome in her own decided talent for economy. Not that economy was always pleasant to her. When people are very poor for their position in life, they can only keep out of debt by stinting on many occasions when stinting is very painful to a liberal spirit. And it requires a sterner virtue than good-nature to hold fast the truth that it is nobler to be shabby and honest than to do things handsomely in debt.

But long before Tom had a bill even for bull's-eyes and Gibraltar Rock. Madam Liberty was pinching and plotting, and saving bits of coloured paper and ends of ribbon, with a thriftiness which seemed to justify Tom's view of her character.

The object of these savings was twofold: birthday presents and Christmas-boxes. They were the chief cares and triumphs of Madam Liberty's childhood. It was with the next birthday or the approaching Christmas in view that she saved her pence instead of spending them, but she so seldom had any money that she chiefly relied on her own ingenuity. Year by year it became more difficult to make anything which would "do for a boy;" but it was easy to please Darling, and "Mother's" unabated appreciation of pincushions, and of needle-books made out of old cards, was most satisfactory.

To break the mystery in which it always pleased Madam Liberty to shroud her small preparations, was to give her dire offence. As a rule, the others respected this caprice, and would even feign a little more surprise than they felt, upon occasion. But if during her preparations she had given umbrage to one of the boys, her retreat was soon invaded

with cries of—"Ah! I see you, making birthday presents out of nothing and a quarter of a yard of ribbon!" Or—"There you are! At it again, with two old visiting cards and a ha'porth of flannel!" And only Darling's tenderest kisses could appease Madam Liberty's wrath and dry her tears.

She had never made a grander project for Christmas, or had greater difficulty in carrying it out, than in the winter which followed her visit to the seaside. It was in the house of her cousin that she had first heard of Christmas-trees, and to surprise the others with a Christmas-tree she was quite resolved. But as the time drew near, poor Madam Liberty was almost in despair about her presents, and this was doubly provoking, because a nice little fir-tree had been promised her. There was no blinking the fact that "Mother" had been provided with pincushions to repletion. And most of these made the needles rusty, from being stuffed with damp pig-meal, when the pigs and the pincushions were both being fattened for Christmas.

Madam Liberty sat with her little pale face on her hand and her slate before her, making her calculations. She wondered what emery-powder cost. Supposing it to be very cheap, and that she could get a quarter of a pound for "next to nothing," how useful a present might be made for "Mother" in the shape of an emery pincushion, to counteract the evil effects of the pig-meal ones! It would be a novelty even to Darling, especially if hers were made by glueing a tiny bag of emery into the mouth of a "boiled fowl cowry." Madam Liberty had seen such a pincushion in Podmore's work-basket. She had a shell of the kind, and the village carpenter would always let her put a stick into his glue-pot if she went to the shop.

But then, if emery were only a penny a pound, Madam Liberty had not a farthing to buy a quarter of a pound with. As she thought of this her brow contracted, partly with vexation, and partly because of a jumping pain in a big tooth, which, either from much illness or many medicines, or both, was now but the wreck of what a tooth should be. But as the toothache grew worse, a new hope dawned upon Madam Liberty. Perhaps one of her troubles would mend the other!

Being very tender-hearted over children's sufferings, it was her mother's custom to bribe rather than coerce when teeth had to be taken out. The fixed scale of reward was sixpence for a tooth without fangs, and a shilling for one with them. If pain were any evidence, this tooth certainly had fangs. But one does not have a tooth taken out if one can avoid it, and Madam Liberty bore bad nights and painful days till they could be endured no longer; and then, because she knew it distressed her mother to be present, she went alone to the doctor's house to ask him to take out her tooth.

The doctor was a very kind old man, and he did his best, so we will not say anything about his antique instruments, or the number of times he tied a pocket-handkerchief round an awful-looking claw, and put both into Madam Liberty's mouth without effect.

At last he said he had got the tooth out, and he wrapped it in paper, and gave it to Madam Liberty, who, having thought that it was her head he had extracted from its socket, was relieved to get away.

As she ran home she began to plan how to lay out her shilling for the best, and when she was nearly there she opened the bit of paper to look at her enemy, and it had no fangs!

"I'm *sure* it was more than a sixpenny one," she sobbed; "I believe he has left them in."

It involved more than the loss of half the funds she had reckoned upon. Perhaps this dreadful pain would go on even on Christmas Day. Her first thought was to carry her tears to her mother; her second that, if she only could be brave enough to have the fangs taken out, she might spare Mother all distress about it till it was over, when she would certainly like her sufferings to be known and sympathised with. She knew well that courage does not come with waiting, and making a desperate rally of stout-heartedness, she ran back to the doctor.

He had gone out, but his assistant was in. He looked at Madam Liberty's mouth, and said that the fangs were certainly left in and would be much better out.

"Would it hurt *very* much?" asked Madam Liberty, trembling.

The assistant blinked the question of "hurting."

"I think I could do it," said he, "if you could sit still. Not if you were jumping about."

"I will sit still," said Madam Liberty.

"The boy shall hold your head," said the assistant.

But Madam Liberty rebelled; she could screw up her sensitive nerves to endure the pain, but not to be coerced by "the boy."

"I give you my word of honour I will sit still," said she, with plaintive earnestness.

And the assistant (who had just remembered that the boy was out with the gig) said, "Very well, miss."

We need not dwell upon the next few seconds. The assistant kept his word, and Madam Liberty kept hers. She sat still, and went on sitting still after the

operation was over till the assistant became alarmed, and revived her by pouring some choking stuff down her throat. After which she staggered to her feet and put out her hand and thanked him.

He was a strong, rough, good-natured young man, and little Madam Liberty's pale face and politeness touched him.

"You're the bravest little lady I ever knew," he said kindly; "and you keep your word like a queen. There's some stuff to put to the place, and there's sixpence, miss, if you'll take it, to buy lollipops with. You'll be able to eat them now."

After which he gave her an old pill-box to carry the fragments of her tooth in, and it was labelled "three to be taken at bedtime."

Madam Liberty staggered home, very giddy, but very happy. Moralists say a great deal about pain treading so very closely on the heels of pleasure in this life, but they are not always wise or grateful enough to speak of the pleasure which springs out of pain. And yet there is a bliss which comes just when pain has ceased, whose rapture rivals even the high happiness of unbroken health; and there is a keen relish about small pleasures hardly earned, in which the full measure of those who can afford anything they want is sometimes lacking.

Relief is certainly one of the most delicious sensations which poor humanity can enjoy! Madam Liberty enjoyed it to the full, and she had more happiness yet in her cup. I fear praise was very pleasant to her, and the assistant had praised her, not undeservedly, and she knew that further praise was in store from the dearest source of approbation—from her mother. Ah! how pleased she would be! And so would Darling, who always cried when Madam Liberty was in great pain.

And this was only the beginning of pleasures. The sixpence would amply provide "goodies" for the Christmas-tree, and much might be done with the forthcoming shilling. And if her conduct on the present occasion would not support a request for a few ends of candles from the drawing-room candle-sticks, what profit would there be in being a heroine?

When her mother gave her two shillings instead of one, Madam Liberty felt in honour bound to say that she had already been rewarded with sixpence; but her mother only said:

"You quite deserved it, I'm sure," and she found herself in possession of no less than half-a-crown.

And now it is sad to relate that misfortune again overtook Madam Liberty. All the next day she longed to go into the village to buy sweetmeats, but it snowed and rained, and was bitterly cold, and she could not.

Just about dusk the weather slightly cleared up, and she picked her way through the melting snow to the shop. Her purchases were most satisfactory. How the boys would enjoy them! Madam Liberty enjoyed them already, though her face was still sore, and the pain had spread to her throat, and though her ideas seemed unusually brilliant, and her body pleasantly languid, which, added to a peculiar chill trembling of the knees—generally forewarned her of a coming quinsy. But warnings were thrown away upon Madam Liberty's obdurate hopefulness.

Just now she could think of nothing but the coming Christmas-tree. She hid the sweetmeats, and put her hand into her pocket for the two shillings, the exact outlay of which, in the neighbouring town, by means of the carrier, she had already arranged. But—the two shillings were

gone! How she had lost them Madam Liberty had no idea.

She trudged through the dirty snow once more to the shop, and the counter was examined, and old Goody looked under the flour scales and in the big chinks of the stone floor. But the shillings were not there, and Madam Liberty kept her eyes on the pavement as she ran home, with as little result. Moreover, it was nearly dark.

It snowed heavily all night, and Madam Liberty slept very little from pain and anxiety; but this did not deter her from going out with the first daylight in the morning to rake among the snow near the door, although her throat was sore beyond concealment, her jaws stiff, and the pleasant languor and quick-wittedness had given way to restless fever.

Her conscience did prick her a little for the anxiety she was bringing upon her mother (her own sufferings she never forecast); but she could not give up her Christmas-tree without a struggle, and she hoped by a few familiar remedies to drive back the threatened illness.

Meanwhile, if the shillings were not found before eleven o'clock it would be too late to send to the town shop by the carrier. But they were not found, and the old hooded cart rumbled away without them.

It was Christmas Eve. The boys were bustling about with holly. Darling was perched on a very high chair in the kitchen, picking raisins in the most honourable manner, without eating one, and Madam Liberty ought to have been the happiest of all.

Even now she dried her tears, and made the best of her ill-luck. The sweetmeats were very good; and it was yet in her power to please the others, though by a sacrifice from which she had shrunk. She could divide her scalloppshells among

them. It was economy—economy of resources—which made her hesitate. Separated—they would please the boys once, and then be lost. Kept together in her own possession—they would be a constant source of triumph for herself, and of treats for her brothers and sister.

Meanwhile, she would gargle her throat with salt and water. As she crept upstairs with this purpose, she met her mother.

Madam Liberty had not looked in the looking-glass lately, so she did not understand her mother's exclamation of distress when they met. Her face was perfectly white, except where dark marks lay under her eyes, and her small lips formed between them the rigid line of pain. It was impossible to hold out any longer, and Madam Liberty broke down and poured forth all her woes.

"I'll put my feet in hot water, and do anything you like, mother dear," said she, "if only you'll let me try and have a tree, and keep it secret from the others. I do so want to surprise them."

"If you'll go to your room, my darling, and do as I tell you, I'll keep your secret, and help you with your tree," said her mother. "Don't cry, my child, don't cry; it's so bad for your throat. I think I can find you some beads to make a necklace for Darling, and three pencils for the boys, and some paper which you can cut up into drawing-books for them."

A little hope went a long way with Madam Liberty, and she began to take heart. At the same time she felt her illness more keenly now there was no need for concealing it. She sat over the fire and inhaled steam from an old teapot, and threaded beads, and hoped she would be allowed to go to church next day, and to preside at her Christmas-tree afterwards.

In the afternoon her throat grew rapidly worse. She had begged—almost impatiently—that Darling would not leave the Christmas preparations to sit with her, and as talking was bad for her, and as she had secret preparations to make on her own account, her mother had supported her wish to be left alone.

But when it grew dusk, and the drawing-books were finished, Madam Liberty felt lonely. She put a shawl round her head, and went to the window. There was not much to be seen. The fields were deeply buried in snow, and looked like great white feather beds, shaken up unequally against the hedges. The road was covered so deeply that she could hardly have traced it, if she had not known where it was. How dark the old church tower looked amid so much whiteness!

And the snow-flakes fell like sugar-plums among the black trees. One could almost hear the keen wind rustling through the bending sedges by the pond, where the ice looked quite "safe" now. Madam Liberty hoped she would be able to get out before this fine frost was over. She knew of an old plank which would make an admirable sledge, and she had a plan for the grandest of winter games all ready in her head. It was to be called Arctic Discovery—and she was to be the chief discoverer.

As she fancied herself—starving but scientific, chilled to the bone, yet undaunted—discovering a north-west passage at the upper end of the goose-pond, the clock struck three from the old church tower. Madam Liberty heard it with a pang. At three o'clock—if he had had her shillings—she would have been expecting the return of the carrier, with the presents for her Christmas-tree.

Even as she thought about it, the old hooded waggon came lumbering down

among the snow-drifts in the lane. There was a bunch of mistletoe at the head, and the old carrier went before the horse, and the dog went before the carrier. And they were all three up to their knees in snow, and all three had their noses down, as much as to say, "Such is life; but we must struggle on."

Poor Madam Liberty! The sight of the waggon and the mistletoe overwhelmed her. It only made matters worse to see the waggon come towards the house. She rather wondered what the carrier was bringing; but whatever it was, it was not the toys.

She went back to her seat by the fire, and cried bitterly; and, as she cried, the ball in her throat seemed to grow larger, till she could hardly breathe. She was glad when the door opened, and her mother's kind face looked in.

"Is Darling here?" she asked.

"No, mother," said Madam Liberty huskily.

"Then you may bring it in," said her mother to some one outside, and the servant appeared, carrying a wooden box, which she put down before Madam Liberty, and then withdrew. "Now don't speak," said her mother, "it is bad for you, and your eyes have asked fifty questions already, my child. Where did the box come from? The carrier brought it. Who is it for? It's for you. Who sent it? That I don't know. What is inside? I thought you would like to be the first to see. My idea is that perhaps your godmother has sent you a Christmas-box, and I thought that there might be things in it which would help you with your Christmas-tree, so I have not told anyone about it."

To the end of her life Madam Liberty never forgot that Christmas-box. It did not come from her godmother, and the name of the giver she never knew. The first thing in it was a card, on which was

written—"A Christmas-box from an unknown friend;" and the second thing in it was the set of china tea-things with the green rim; and the third thing was a box of doll's furniture.

"Oh, mother!" cried Madam Liberty, "they're the very things I was counting over in the bazaar, when the shopman heard me."

"Did anybody else hear you?" asked her mother.

"There was a lady, who said, 'I think the little girl said the box of beasts.' And, oh! mother, mother! here *is* the box of beasts! They're not common beasts, you know—not wooden ones, painted; they're rough, something like hair. And feel the old elephant's ears, they're quite leathery, and the lion has real long hair for his mane and the tip of his tail. They are such thorough beasts. Oh, how the boys will like them! Tom shall have the darling brown bear. I do think he is the very best beast of all; his mouth is a little open, you know, and you can see his tongue, and it's red. And mother! the sheep are curly! And oh, what a dog! with real hair. I think I *must* keep the dog. And I shall make him a paper collar, and print 'Faithful' on it, and let him always stand on the drawers by our bed, and he'll be Darling's and my watch-dog."

Happiness is sometimes very wholesome, but it does not cure a quinsy off hand. Darling cried that night when the big pillow was brought out, which Madam Liberty always slept against in her quinsies, to keep her from choking. She did not know of that consolatory Christmas-box in the cupboard.

On Christmas Day Madam Liberty was speechless. The quinsy had progressed very rapidly.

"It generally breaks the day I have to write on my slate," Madam Liberty

wrote, looking up at her mother with piteous eyes.

She was conscious that she had been greatly to blame for what she was suffering, and was anxious to "behave well about it" as an atonement. She begged—on her slate—that no one would stay away from church on her account, but her mother would not leave her.

"And now the others are gone," said Mother, "since you won't let the Christmas-tree be put off, I propose that we have it up, and I dress it under your orders, whilst the others are out, and then it can be moved into the little book-room, all ready for to-night."

Madam Liberty nodded like a china mandarin.

"But you are in sad pain, I fear?" said her mother.

"One can't have everything," wrote Madam Liberty on her slate. Many illnesses had made her a very philosophical little woman; and, indeed, if the quinsy broke and she were at ease, the combination of good things would be more than anyone could reasonably expect, even at Christmas.

Every beast was labelled, and hung up by her orders. The box of furniture was addressed to herself and Darling, as a joint possession, and the sweetmeats were tied in bags of muslin. The tree looked charming. The very angel at the top seemed proud of it.

"I'll leave the tea-things upstairs," said Mother.

But Madam Liberty shook her head vigorously. She had been making up her mind, as she sat steaming over the old teapot; and now she wrote on her slate, "Put a white cloth round the tub, and put out the tea-things like a tea-party, and put a ticket in the slop-basin—*For Darling. With very, VERY Best Love.* Make the last 'very' very big."

Madam Liberty's mother nodded, but she was printing a ticket; much too large a ticket, however, to go into the green and white slop-basin. When it was done she hung it on the tree, under the angel. The inscription was—*From Madam Liberty.*

When supper was over, she came up to Madam Liberty's room, and said:

"Now, my dear, if you like to change your mind and put off the tree till you are better, I will say nothing about it."

But Madam Liberty shook her head more vehemently than before, and her mother smiled and went away.

Madam Liberty strained her ears. The book-room door opened—she knew the voice of the handle—there was a rush and a noise, but it died away into the room. The tears broke down Madam Liberty's cheeks. It was hard not to be there now. Then there was a patter up the stairs, and flying steps along the landing, and Madam Liberty's door was opened by Darling. She was dressed in the pink dress, and her cheeks were pinker still, and her eyes full of tears. And she threw herself at Madam Liberty's feet, crying:

"Oh *how* good, how *very* good you are!"

At this moment a roar came up from below, and Madam Liberty wrote:

"What is it?" and then dropped the slate to clutch the arms of her chair, for the pain was becoming almost intolerable. Before Darling could open the door her mother came in, and Darling repeated the question—

"What is it?"

But at this moment the reply came from below, in Tom's loudest tones. It rang through the house, and up into the bedroom.

"Three cheers for Madam Liberty! Hip, hip, hooray!"

The extremes of pleasure and of pain

seemed to meet in Madam Liberty's little head. But overwhelming gratification got the upper hand, and, forgetting even her quinsy, she tried to speak, and after a brief struggle she said, with tolerable distinctness :

"Tell Tom I am very much obliged to him."

But what they did tell Tom was that the quinsy had broken, on which he gave three cheers more.

PART II.

MADAM LIBERALITY grew up into much the same sort of person that she was when a child. She always had been what is termed old-fashioned, and the older she grew the better her old-fashionedness became her, so that at last her friends would say to her, "Ah, if we all wore as well as you do, my dear! You've hardly changed at all since we remember you in short petticoats." So far as she did change the change was for the better. (It is to be hoped we do improve a little as we get older!) She was still liberal and economical. She still planned and hoped indefatigably. She was still tender-hearted in the sense in which Gray speaks:

"To each his sufferings, all are men
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own."

She still had a good deal of ill-health and ill-luck, and a good deal of pleasure in spite of both. She was still happy in the happiness of others, and pleased by their praise. But she was less headstrong and opinionated in her plans, and less fretful when they failed. It is possible, after one has cut one's wisdom-teeth, to cure one's self even of a good deal of vanity, and to learn to play the second fiddle very gracefully; and Madam Liberty did not resist the lessons of life.

GOD teaches us wisdom in divers ways. Why He suffers some people to have so many troubles and so little of what we call pleasure in this world we cannot in this world know. The heaviest blows

often fall on the weakest shoulders, and how these endure and bear up under them is another of the things which GOD knows better than we.

I will not pretend to decide whether grown-up people's troubles are harder to bear than children's troubles, but they are of a graver kind. It is very bitter when the boys melt the nose of one's dearest doll against the stove, and living pets with kind eyes and friendly paws grow aged and die; but the death of friends is a more serious and lasting sorrow, if it is not more real.

Madam Liberty shed fewer tears after she grew up than she had done before, but she had some heartaches which did not heal.

The thing which did most to cure her of being too managing for the good of other people was Darling's marriage. If ever Madam Liberty had felt proud of self-sacrifice and success, it was about this. But when Darling was fairly gone, and "Faithful"—very grey with dust and years—kept watch over only one sister in "the girls' room," he might have seen Madam Liberty's nightly tears if his eyes had been made of anything more sensitive than yellow paint.

Desolate as she was, Madam Liberty would have hugged her grief if she could have had her old consolation, and been happy in the happiness of another. Darling never said she was not happy. It was what she left out, not what she put into the long letters she sent from

India that cut Madam Liberty to the heart.

Darling's husband read all her letters, and he did not like the home ones to be too tender—as if Darling's mother and sister pitied her. And he read Darling's letters before they went away by the mail.

From this it came about that the sisters' letters were very commonplace on the surface. And though Madam Liberty cried when Darling wrote, "Have swallows built in the summer-house this year? Have you put my old doll's chest of drawers back in its place since the room was papered? What colour is the paper?"—the Major only said that stuff like that was hardly worth the postage to England. And when Madam Liberty wrote, "The clump of daffodils in your old bed was enormous this spring. I have not touched it since you left. I made mother's birthday wreath out of the flowers in your bed and mine. Jemima broke the slop-basin of the green and white tea-set to-day. It was the last piece left. I am trying to forgive her,"—the major made no harsher remark than, "A storm in a slop-basin! Your sister is not a brilliant letter-writer, certainly."

The source of another heartache for Madam Liberty was poor Tom. He was as liberal and hospitable as ever in his own way. He invited his friends to stay with his mother, and when they and Tom had gone, Madam Liberty and her mother lived without meat to get the housekeeping book straight again. Their great difficulty in the matter was the uncertain nature of Tom's requirements. And when he did write for money he always wrote in such urgent need that there was no refusing him if by the art of "doing without" his wants could be supplied.

But Tom had a kindly heart; he sent his sister a gold locket, and wrote on the

box, "For the best and most generous of sisters."

Madam Liberty liked praise, and she dearly liked praise from Tom; but on this occasion it failed to soothe her. She said curtly, "I suppose it's not paid for. If we can't afford much, we can afford to live at our own expense, and not on the knavery or the forbearance of tradesmen." With which she threw the locket into a box of odds and ends, and turned the key with some temper.

Years passed, and Madam Liberty was alone. Her mother was dead, and Tom—poor Tom!—had been found drowned. Darling was still in India, and the two living boys were in the colonies, farming.

It seemed to be an aggravation of the calamity of Tom's death that he died, as he had lived, in debt. But, as regards Madam Liberty, it was not an unmixed evil. It is one of our bitterest pangs when we survive those we love that with death the opportunity has passed for being kind to them, though we love them more than ever. By what earthly effort could Madam Liberty's mother now be pleased, whom so little had pleased heretofore?

But for poor Tom it was still possible to plan, to economise, to be liberal—and by these means to pay his debts, and save the fair name of which he had been as reckless as of everything else which he possessed.

Madam Liberty had had many a hard struggle to get Tom a birthday present, but she had never pinched and planned and saved on his behalf as she did now. There is a limit, however, to the strictest economies. It would have taken a longer time to finish her labour of love but for "the other boys." They were good, kind fellows, and having had to earn daily bread where larks do not fall ready cooked into the mouth, they knew more

of the realities of life than poor Tom had ever learned. They were prosperous now, and often sent a few pounds to Madam Liberty "to buy a present with."

"And none of your old 'Liberality' tricks, mind!" George wrote on one occasion. "Fit yourself thoroughly out in the latest fashions, and do us credit!"

But it all went to Tom's tailor.

She felt hardly justified in diverting George's money from his purpose; but she had never told the boys of Tom's debts. There was something of her old love of doing things without help in this, and more of her special love for Tom.

It was not from the boys alone that help came to her. Madam Liberty's godmother died, and left her fifty pounds. In one lump she had now got enough to finish her work.

The acknowledgments of these last payments came on Tom's birthday. More and more courteous had grown the tradesmen's letters, and Madam Liberty felt a foolish pleasure in seeing how respectfully they all spoke now of "Your lamented brother, Madam!"

The jeweller's bill was the last; and when Madam Liberty tied up the bundle, she got out Tom's locket and put a bit of his hair into it, and tied it round her throat, sobbing as she did so, "Oh, Tom, if you *could* have lived and been happy in a small way! Your debts are paid now, my poor boy. I wonder if you know. Oh, Tom, Tom!"

It was her greatest triumph—to have saved Tom's fair name in the place where he had lived so foolishly and died so sadly.

But the triumphs of childhood cast fewer shadows. There was no one now to say, "Three cheers for Madam Liberty!"

It was a very cold winter, but Madam

Liberty and Jemima, the maid-of-all-work, were warmer than they had been for several previous winters, because they kept better fires. Time heals our sorrows in spite of us, and Madam Liberty was a very cheerful little body now, and as busy as ever about her Christmas-boxes. Those for her nephews and nieces were already despatched. "The boys" were married; Madam Liberty was godmother to several children she had never seen; but the Benjamin of his aunt's heart was Darling's only child—Tom—though she had not seen even him.

Madam Liberty was still in the thick of her plans, which were chiefly to benefit the old people and the well-behaved children of the village. All the Christmas-boxes were to be "surprises," and Jemima was in every secret but the one which most concerned her.

Madam Liberty had even some plans for her own benefit. George had talked of coming home in the summer, and she began to think of saving up for a new carpet for the drawing-room. Then the last time she went to the town she saw some curtains of a most artistic pattern, and particularly cheap. So much good taste for so little money was rare in provincial shops. By-and-by she might do without something which would balance the cost of the curtains. And she had another ambition—to provide Jemima with black dresses and white muslin aprons for afternoon wear in addition to her wages, that the outward aspect of that good soul might be more in accordance than hitherto with her intrinsic excellence.

She was pondering this when Jemima burst in in her cooking apron, followed up the passage by the steam of Christmas cakes, and carrying a letter.

"It's a big one, Miss," said she. "Perhaps it's a Christmas-box, Miss."

And beaming with geniality and kitchen warmth, *Jemima* returned to her labours.

Madam Liberty made up her mind about the dresses and aprons; then she opened her letter.

It announced the death of her cousin, her godmother's husband. It announced also that, in spite of the closest search for a will, which he was supposed to have made, this could not be found.

Possibly he had destroyed it, intending to make another. As it was he had died intestate, and succession not being limited to heirs male, and *Madam Liberty* being the eldest child of his nearest relative—the old childish feeling of its being a dream came over her.

She pinched herself, however, to no purpose. There lay the letter, and after a second reading *Madam Liberty* picked up the thread of the narrative and arrived at the result—she had inherited fifteen thousand a year.

The first rational idea which came to her was that there was no difficulty now about getting the curtains; and the second was that their chief merit was a merit no more. What is the good of a thing being cheap when one has fifteen thousand a year?

Madam Liberty poked the fire extravagantly, and sat down to think.

The curtains naturally led her to household questions, and those to that invaluable person, *Jemima*. That *Jemima's* wages should be doubled, trebled, quadrupled, was a thing of course. What post she was to fill in the new circumstances was another matter. Remembering *Podmore*, and recalling the fatigue of dressing herself after her pretty numerous illnesses, *Madam Liberty* felt that a lady's-maid would be a comfort to be most thankful for. But she could not fancy a *Jemima* in that capacity, or as a housekeeper, or even as head housemaid or cook. She had lived

for years with *Jemima* herself, but she could not fit her into a suitable place in the servants' hall.

However, with fifteen thousand a year, *Madam Liberty* could buy, if needful, a field, and build a house, and put *Jemima* into it with a servant to wait upon her. The really important question was about her new domestics. Sixteen servants are a heavy responsibility.

Madam Liberty had very high ideas of the parental duties involved in being the head of a household. She had suffered—more than *Jemima*—over *Jemima's* lack of scruple as to telling lies for good purposes. Now a footman is a young man who has, no doubt, his own peculiar temptations. What check could *Madam Liberty* keep upon him? Possibly she might—under the strong pressure of moral responsibility—give good general advice to the footman; but the idea of the butler troubled her.

When one has lived alone in a little house for many years one gets timid. She put a case to herself. Say that she knew the butler to be in the habit of stealing the wine, and suspected the gardener of making a good income by the best of the wall fruit, would she have the moral courage to be as firm with these important personages as if she had caught one of the school-children picking and stealing in the orchard? And if not, would not family prayers be a mockery?

Madam Liberty sighed. Poor dear Tom! He had had his faults certainly; but how well he would have managed a butler!

This touched the weak point of her good fortune to the core. It had come too late to heap luxuries about dear "Mother"; too late to open careers for the boys; too late to give mad frolics and girlish gaieties to light hearts, such as she and *Darling* had once had. Ah, if they

could have enjoyed it together years ago!

There remained, however, Madam Liberty's old consolation: one can be happy in the happiness of others. There were nephews and nieces to be provided for, and a world so full of poor and struggling folk that fifteen thousand a year would only go a little way. It was, perhaps, useful that there had been so many articles lately in the papers about begging letters, and impostors, and the evil effects of the indiscriminate charity of elderly ladies; but the remembrance of them made Madam Liberty's head ache, and troubled her dreams that night.

It was well that the next day was Sunday. Face to face with those greater interests common to the rich and the poor, the living and the dead, Madam Liberty grew calmer under her new cares and prospects. It did not need that brief pause by her mother's grave to remind her how little money can do for us; and the sight of other people wholesomely recalled how much it can effect. Near the church porch she was passed by the wife of a retired chandler, who dressed in very fine silks, and who was accustomed to eye Madam Liberty's old clothes as she bowed to her more obviously than is consistent with good breeding. The little lady nodded very kindly in return. With fifteen thousand a year one can afford to be *quite* at ease in an old shawl.

The next day was Christmas Eve. Madam Liberty caught herself thinking that if the legacy had been smaller—say fifty pounds a year—she would at once have treated herself to certain little embellishments of the old house, for which she had long been ambitious. But it would be absurd to buy two or three yards of rosebud chintz, and tire herself by making covers to two very old

sofa-cushions, when the point to be decided was in which of three grandly furnished mansions she would first take up her abode. She ordered a liberal supper, however, which confirmed Jemima in her secret opinion that the big letter had brought good news.

When, therefore, another letter of similar appearance arrived, Jemima snatched up the waiter and burst breathlessly in upon Madam Liberty, leaving the door open behind her, though it was bitterly cold and the snow fell fast.

And when Madam Liberty opened this letter she learned that her cousin's will had been found, and that (as seems to be natural) he had left his money where it would be associated with more money and kept well together. His heir was a cousin also, but in the next degree—an old bachelor, who was already wealthy; and he had left Madam Liberty five pounds to buy a mourning ring.

It had been said that Madam Liberty was used to disappointment, but some minutes passed before she quite realized the downfall of her latest visions. Then the old sofa-cushions resumed their importance, and she flattened the fire into a more economical shape, and set vigorously to work to decorate the house with the Christmas evergreens. She had just finished and gone upstairs to wash her hands when the church clock struck three.

It was an old house, and the window of the bedroom went down to the floor, and had a deep window-seat. Madam Liberty sat down in it and looked out. She expected some linsey-woolsey by the carrier, to make Christmas petticoats, and she was glad to see the hooded waggon ploughing its way through the snow. The goose-pond was firmly frozen, and everything looked as it had looked years ago, except that the carrier's young son went

before the waggon and a young dog went before him. They passed slowly out of sight, but Madam Liberty sat on. She gazed dreamily at the old church, and the trees, and the pond, and thought of the past; of her mother, and of poor Tom, and of Darling, and she thought till she fancied that she heard Darling's voice in the passage below. She got up to go down to *Jemima*, but as she did so she heard a footstep on the stairs, and it was not *Jemima's* tread. It was too light for the step of any man or woman.

Then the door opened, and on the threshold of Madam Liberty's room stood a little boy dressed in black, with his little hat pushed back from the loveliest of baby faces set in long flaxen hair. The carnation colour of his cheeks was deepened by the frost, and his bright eyes were brighter from mingled daring and doubt and curiosity, as he looked leisurely round the room and said in a slow, high-pitched, and very distinct tone,

"Where are you, Aunt Liberty?"

But, lovely as he was, Madam Liberty ran past him, for another figure was in the doorway now, also in black, and with a widow's cap; and Madam Liberty and Darling fell sobbing into each other's arms.

"This is better than fifteen thousand a year," said Madam Liberty.

* * * *

It is not necessary to say much more. The Major had been killed by a fall from horseback, and Darling came back to live at her old home. She had a little pension, and the sisters were not parted again.

It would be idle to dwell on Madam Liberty's devotion to her nephew, or the princely manner in which he accepted her services. That his pleasure was the object of a new series of plans, and presents, and

surprises, will be readily understood. The curtains were bought, but the new carpet had to be deferred in consequence of an extravagant outlay on mechanical toys. When the working of these brought a deeper tint into his cheeks, and a brighter light into his eyes, Madam Liberty was quite happy; and when he broke them one after another, his infatuated aunt believed this to be a precocious development of manly energies.

The longest lived, if not the favourite, toys with him were the old set of scallop shells, with which he never wearied of making feasts, to which Madam Liberty was never weary of being invited. He had more plums than had ever sweetened her childhood, and when they sat together on two footstools by the sofa, and Tom announced the contents of the dishes in his shrillest voice and lifted the covers, Madam Liberty would say in a tone of apology,

"It's very odd, Darling, and I'm sure at my time of life it's disgraceful, but I cannot feel old!"

We could hardly take leave of Madam Liberty in pleasanter circumstances. Why should we ask whether, for the rest of her life, she was rich or poor, when we may feel so certain that she was contented? No doubt she had many another hope and disappointment to keep life from stagnating.

As a matter of fact she outlived the bachelor cousin, and if he died intestate she must have been rich after all. Perhaps she was. Perhaps she never suffered again from insufficient food or warmth. Perhaps the illnesses of her later years were alleviated by skill and comforts such as hitherto she had never known. Perhaps Darling and she enjoyed a sort of second spring in their old age, and went every year to the Continent, and grew wonderful flowers in the greenhouse, and sent Tom

to Eton, and provided for their nephews and nieces, and built churches to their mother's memory, and never had to withhold the liberal hand from helping because it was empty ; and so passed by a time of wealth to the hour of death.

Or perhaps the cousin took good care to bequeath his money where there was more money for it to stick to. And Madam Liberality pinched out her little presents as heretofore, and kept herself warm with a hot bottle when she could not afford a fire, and was too thankful to have Darling with her when she was ill to

want anything else. And perhaps Darling and she prepared Tom for school, and (like many another widow's son) he did them credit. And perhaps they were quite happy with a few common pot-plants in the sunny window, and kept their mother's memory green by flowers about her grave, and so passed by a life of small cares and small pleasures to where

"Divided households reunite."

Of one thing we may be quite certain. Rich or poor, she was always

MADAM LIBERALITY.

THE END.



"All I knew of him was his portrait, a *silhouette*, deeply framed in black wood—which hung against the nursery wall. I was ignorant of his surname and history, I had never examined his features. But I knew that happily he had been very stout, since his ample coat and waistcoat, cut out in black paper, converted the glass which covered them into an excellent mirror for my dolls. Worthy Mr. Joseph! Here he was coming in useful again!" (Page 32)

MRS. OVERTHEWAY'S REMEMBRANCES.

BY JULIANA HORATIA EWING,

AUTHOR OF "A FLAT IRON FOR A FARTHING," "JAN OF
THE WINDMILL," "JACKANAPES," ETC. ETC.

WITH TEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. A. PASQUIER AND J. WOLF.

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TO MY HUSBAND

A. E.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF

1866 AND 1867.

J. H. E.

TO THE HONORABLE

A. E.

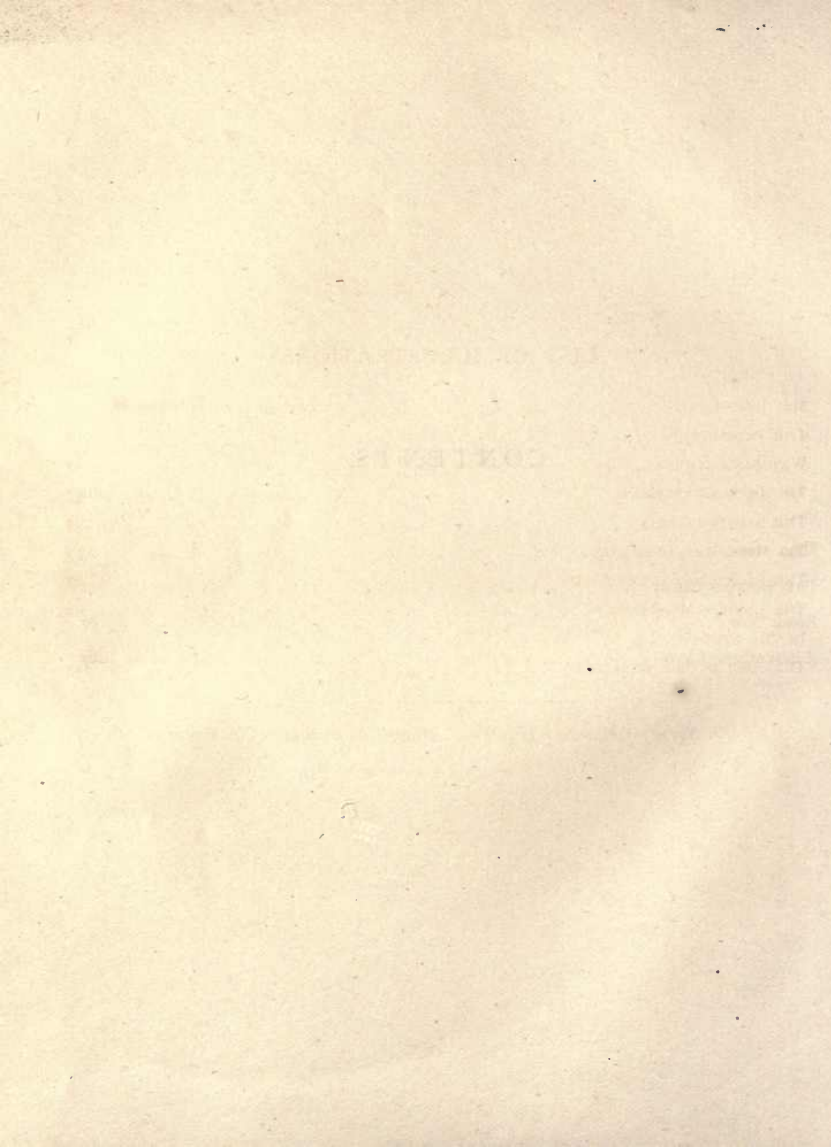
IN REPLY TO

LETTER OF

J. H. E.

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The Nest of the Albatross is by J. WOLF ; the other Illustrations by J. A. PASQUIER.

IDA.

. . . . "Thou shalt not lack
The flower that's like thy face, pale Primrose."
Cymbeline.

MRS. OVERTHEWAY'S REMEMBRANCES.

IDA.

THE little old lady lived over the way, through a green gate that shut with a click, and up three white steps. Every morning at eight o'clock the church bell chimed for Morning Prayer — chim! chime! chim! chime! — and every morning at eight o'clock the little old lady came down the white steps, and opened the gate with a click, and went where the bells were calling.

About this time little Ida would kneel on a chair at her nursery window in the opposite house to watch the old lady come out and go. The old lady was one of those people who look always the same. Every morning her cheeks looked like faded rose leaves, and her white hair like a snow-wreath in a garden laughing at the last tea-rose. Every morning she wore the same black satin bonnet, and the same white shawl; had delicate gloves on the smallest of hands, and gathered her skirt daintily up from the smallest of feet. Every morning she carried a clean pocket-handkerchief, and a fresh rose in the same hand with her Prayer-book; and as the Prayer-book being bound up with the Bible was very thick, she seemed to have some difficulty in so doing. Every morning, whatever the weather might be, she stood outside the green gate, and looked up at the sky to see if this were clear, and

down at the ground to see if that were dry; and so went where the bells were calling.

Ida knew the little old lady quite well by sight, but she did not know her name. Perhaps Ida's great-uncle knew it; but he was a grave, unsociable man, who saw very little of his neighbours, so perhaps he did not; and Ida stood too much in awe of him to trouble him with idle questions. She had once asked Nurse, but Nurse did not know; so the quiet orphan child asked no more. She made up a name for the little old lady herself, however, after the manner of Mr. John Bunyan, and called her Mrs. Overthaway; and morning after morning, though the bread-and-milk breakfast smoked upon the table, she would linger at the window, beseeching —

"One minute more, dear Nurse! Please let me wait till Mrs. Overthaway has gone to church."

And when the little old lady had come out and gone, Ida would creep from her perch, and begin her breakfast. Then, if the chimes went on till half the basinful was eaten, little Ida would nod her head contentedly, and whisper:

"Mrs. Overthaway was in time."

Little Ida's history was a sad one. Her troubles began when she was but a year old, with the greatest of earthly losses —

for then her mother died, leaving a sailor husband and their infant child. The sea-captain could face danger, but not an empty home; so he went back to the winds and the waves, leaving his little daughter with relations. Six long years had he been away, and Ida had had many homes, and yet, somehow, no home, when one day the postman brought her a large letter, with her own name written upon it in a large hand. This was no old envelope sealed up again—no make-believe epistle to be put into the post through the nursery door; it was a real letter, with a real seal, real stamps, and a great many post-marks; and when Ida opened it there were two sheets written by the Captain's very own hand, in round fat characters, easy to read, with a sketch of the Captain's very own ship at the top, and—most welcome above all!—the news that the Captain's very own self was coming home.

"I shall have a papa all to myself very soon, Nurse," said Ida. "He has written a letter to me, and made me a picture of his ship; it is the *Bonne Esperance*, which he says means Good Hope. I love this letter better than anything he has ever sent me."

Nevertheless, Ida took out the carved fans and workboxes, the beads and handkerchiefs and feathers, the dainty foreign treasures the sailor-father had sent to her from time to time; dusted them, kissed them, and told them that the Captain was coming home. But the letter she wore in her pocket by day, and kept under her pillow by night.

"Why don't you put your letter into one of your boxes, like a tidy young lady, Miss Ida?" said Nurse. "You'll wear it all to bits doing as you do."

"It will last till the ship comes home," said Miss Ida.

It had need then to have been written on the rock, graven with an iron pen for

ever; for the *Bonne Esperance* (like other earthly hopes) had perished to return no more. She foundered on her homeward voyage, and went down into the great waters, whilst Ida slept through the stormy night, with the Captain's letter beneath her pillow.

Alas! Alas! Alas

* * * *

Two or three months had now passed away since Ida became an orphan. She had become accustomed to the crape-hung frock; she had learnt to read the Captain's letter as the memorial of a good hope which it had pleased God to disappoint; she was fairly happy again. It was in the midst of that new desolation in her lonely life that she had come to stay with her great-uncle, and had begun to watch the doings of the little old lady who lived over the way. When dolls seemed vanity, and Noah's Ark a burden, it had been a quiet amusement, demanding no exertion, to see what little she could see of the old lady's life, and to speculate about what she could not; to wonder and fancy what Mrs. Overthway looked like without her bonnet, and what she did with herself when she was not at church. Ida's imagination did not carry her far. She believed her friend to be old, immeasurably old, indefinitely old; and had a secret faith that she had never been otherwise. She felt sure that she wore a cap indoors, and that it was a nicer one than Nurse's; that she had real tea, with sugar and cream, instead of milk-and-water, and hot toast rather than bread-and-treacle for tea; that she helped herself at meals, and went to bed according to her own pleasure and convenience; was—perhaps on these grounds—utterly happy, and had always been so.

"I am only a little girl," said Ida, as she pressed her face sadly to the cold window-pane. "I am only a little girl, and very sad, you know, because Papa was drowned

at sea ; but Mrs. Overthaway is very old, and always happy, and so I love her."

And in this there was both philosophy and truth.

It is a mistake to suppose that the happiness of others is always a distasteful sight to the sad at heart. There are times in which life seems shorn of interests and bereaved of pleasure, when it is a relief, almost amounting to consolation, to believe that any one is happy. It is some feeling of this nature, perhaps, which makes the young so attractive to the old. It soothes like the sound of harmonious music, the sight of harmonious beauty. It witnesses to a conviction lying deep even in the most afflicted souls that (come what may), all things were created good, and man made to be blessed ; before which sorrow and sighing flee away.

This was one of many things which formed the attraction for Ida in the little old lady who lived over the way. That green gate shut in a life of which the child knew nothing, and which might be one of mysterious delights ; to believe that such things could be was consoling, and to imagine them was real entertainment. Ida would sometimes draw a chair quietly to the table beside her own, and fancy that Mrs. Overthaway was having tea with her. She would ask the old lady if she had been in time for church that morning, beg her to take off her bonnet, and apologize politely for the want of hot tea and toast. So far all was well, for Ida could answer any of these remarks on Mrs. Overthaway's behalf ; but it may be believed that after a certain point this one-sided conversation flagged. One day Nurse overheard Ida's low murmurs.

"What are you talking about, Miss Ida?" said she.

"I am pretending to have Mrs. Overthaway to tea," said Ida.

"Little girls shouldn't pretend what's

not true," replied Nurse, in whose philosophy fancy and falsehood were not distinguished. "Play with your dolls, my dear, and don't move the chairs out of their places."

With which Nurse carried off the chair into a corner as if it had been a naughty child, and Ida gave up her day-dream with a sigh ; since to have prolonged the fancy that Mrs. Overthaway was present, she must have imagined her borne off at the crisis of the meal after a fashion not altogether consistent with an old lady's dignity.

Summer passed, and winter came on. There were days when the white steps looked whiter than usual ; when the snow-drift came halfway up the little green gate, and the snow-flakes came softly down with a persistency which threatened to bury the whole town. Ida knew that on such days Mrs. Overthaway could not go out ; but whenever it was tolerably fine the old lady appeared as usual, came daintily down the steps, and went where the bells were calling. Chim ! chime ! chim ! chime ! They sounded so near through the frosty air, that Ida could almost have fancied that the church was coming round through the snowy streets to pick up the congregation.

Mrs. Overthaway looked much the same in winter as in summer. She seemed as fresh and lively as ever, carried her Prayer-book and handkerchief in the same hand, was only more warmly wrapped up, and wore fur-lined boots which were charming. There was one change, however, which went to Ida's heart. The little old lady had no longer a flower to take to church with her. At Christmas she took a sprig of holly, and after that a spray of myrtle, but Ida felt that these were poor substitutes for a rose. She knew that Mrs. Overthaway had flowers somewhere, it is true, for certain pots of forced hyacinths had passed through the little green gate to

the Christmas church decorations; but one's winter garden is too precious to be cropped as recklessly as summer rose-bushes, and the old lady went flowerless to church and enjoyed her bulbs at home. But the change went to Ida's heart.

Spring was early that year. At the beginning of February there was a good deal of snow on the ground, it is true, but the air became milder and milder, and towards the end of the month there came a real spring day, and all the snow was gone.

"You may go and play in the garden, Miss Ida," said Nurse, and Ida went.

She had been kept indoors for a long time by the weather and by a cold, and it was very pleasant to get out again, even when the only amusement was to run up and down the shingly walks and wonder how soon she might begin to garden, and whether the gardener could be induced to give her a piece of ground sufficiently extensive to grow a crop of mustard-and-cress in the form of a capital I. It was the kitchen garden into which Ida had been sent. At the far end it was cut off from the world by an overgrown hedge with large gaps at the bottom, through which Ida could see the high road, a trough for watering horses, and beyond this a wood. The hedge was very thin in February, and Ida had a good view in consequence, and sitting on a stump in the sunshine she peered through the gap to see if any horses came to drink. It was as good as a peep-show, and indeed much better.

"The snow has melted," gurgled the water, "here I am." It was everywhere. The sunshine made the rich green mosses look dry, but in reality they were wet, and so was everything else. Slish! slosh! Put your feet where you would, the water was everywhere. It filled the stone trough, which, being old and grey and steady, kept it still, and bade it reflect the blue sky and the gorgeous mosses; but the trough soon

overflowed, and then the water slipped over the side, and ran off in a wayside stream. "Winter is gone!" it spluttered as it ran. "Winter is gone, winter-is-gone, winterisgone!" And, on the principle that a good thing cannot be said too often, it went on with this all through the summer, till the next winter came and stopped its mouth with icicles. As the stream chattered, so the birds in the wood sang,—Tweet! tweet! chirrup! thristle! Spring! Spring! Spring!—and they twittered from tree to tree, and shook the bare twigs with melody; whilst a single blackbird sitting still upon a bough below, sang "Life!" "Life!" "Life!" with the loudest pipe of his throat, because on such a day it was happiness only to be alive.

It was like a wonderful fairy-tale, to which Ida listened with clasped hands.

Presently another song came from the wood; it was a hymn sung by children's voices, such as one often hears carolled by a troop of little urchins coming home from school. The words fell familiarly on Ida's ears:

"Quite through the streets, with silver sound,
The flood of life doth flow;
Upon whose banks on every side
The wood of life doth grow.

"Thy gardens and thy gallant walks
Continually are green;
There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.

"There trees for evermore bear fruit,
And evermore do spring;
There evermore the Angels sit,
And evermore do sing."

Here the little chorus broke off, and the children came pouring out of the wood with chattering and laughter. Only one lingered, playing under a tree, and finishing the song. The child's voice rose shrill and clear like that of the blackbird above him. He also sang of Life—Eternal Life—knowing little more than the bird of the mean-

ing of his song, and having little less of that devotion of innocence in which happiness is praise.

But Ida had ceased to listen to the singing. Her whole attention was given to the children as they scampered past the hedge, dropping bits of moss and fungi and such like woodland spoil. For, tightly held in the grubby hands of each—plucked with reckless indifference to bud and stalk, and fading fast in their hot prisons—were primroses. Ida started to her feet, a sudden idea filling her brain. The birds were right, Spring had come, and there were flowers—*flowers for Mrs. Overtheway*.

Ida was a very quiet, obedient little girl as a general rule; indeed, in her lonely life she had small temptation to pranks or mischief of any kind. She had often been sent to play in the back garden before, and had never thought of straying beyond its limits; but to-day a strong new feeling had been awakened by the sight of the primroses.

"The hole is very large," said Ida, looking at the gap in the hedge; "if that dead root in the middle were pulled up, it would be wonderfully large."

She pulled the root up, and, though wonderful is a strong term, the hole was certainly larger.

"It is big enough to put one's head through," said Ida, and, stooping down, she exemplified the truth of her observation.

"Where the head goes, the body will follow," they say, and Ida's little body was soon on the other side of the hedge; the adage says nothing about clothes, however, and part of Ida's dress was left behind. It had caught on the stump as she scrambled through. But accidents will happen, and she was in the road, which was something.

"It is like going into the world to seek

one's fortune," she thought; "thus Gerda went to look for little Kay, and so Jorinel sought for the enchanted flower. One always comes to a wood."

And into the wood she came. Dame Nature had laid down her new green carpets, and everything looked lovely; but, as has been before said, it certainly was damp. The little singer under the tree cared no more for this, however, than the blackbird above him.

"Will you tell me, please, where you got your primroses?" asked Ida.

The child made a quaint, half-military salute, and smiled.

"Yonder," he said laconically, and, pointing up the wood, he went on with the song that he could not understand:

"Ah, my sweet home, Jerusalem,
Would GOD I were in thee!
Would GOD my woes were at an end,
Thy joys that I might see!"

Ida went on and on, looking about her as she ran. Presently the wood sloped downwards, and pretty steeply, so that it was somewhat of a scramble; yet still she kept a sharp look-out, but no primroses did she see, except a few here and there upon the ground, which had been plucked too close to their poor heads to be held in anybody's hands. These showed the way, however, and Ida picked them up in sheer pity and carried them with her.

"This is how Hop-o'-my-thumb found his way home," she thought.

At the bottom of the hill ran a little brook, and on the opposite side of the brook was a bank, and on the top of the bank was a hedge, and under the hedge were the primroses. But the brook was between!

Ida looked and hesitated. It was too wide to jump across, and here, as elsewhere, there was more water than usual. To turn back, however, was out of the question. Gerda would not have been daunted in her

search by coming to a stream, nor would any one else that ever was read of in fairy tales. It is true that in Fairy-land there are advantages which cannot always be reckoned upon by commonplace children in this commonplace world. When the straw, the coal, and the bean came to a rivulet in their travels, the straw laid himself across as a bridge for the others, and had not the coal been a degree too hot on one unlucky occasion, they might (for anything Ida knew to the contrary) still have been pursuing their journey in these favourable circumstances. But a travelling-companion who expands into a bridge on an emergency is not to be met with every day; and as to poor Ida—she was alone. She stood first on one leg, and then on the other, she looked at the water, and then at the primroses, and then at the water again, and at last perceived that in one place there was a large, flat, moss-covered stone in the middle of the stream, which stood well out of the water, and from which—could she but reach it—she might scramble to the opposite bank. But how to reach it? that nice, large, secure, comfortable-looking stone.

"I must put some more stones," thought Ida. There were plenty in the stream, and Ida dragged them up, and began to make a ford by piling them together. It was chilly work, for a cloud had come over the sun; and Ida was just a little bit frightened by the fresh-water shrimps, and some queer, many-legged beasts, who shot off the stones as she lifted them. At last the ford was complete. Ida stepped daintily over the bridge she had made, and jumped triumphantly on to the big stone. Alas! for trusting to appearances. The stone that looked so firm, was insecurely balanced below, and at the first shock one side went down with a splash, and Ida went with it. What a triumph for the shrimps! She scrambled to the bank,

however, made up a charming bunch of primroses, and turned to go home. Never mind how she got back across the brook. We have all waded streams before now, and very good fun it is in July, but rather chilly work in February; and, in spite of running home, Ida trembled as much with cold as with excitement when she stood at last before Mrs. Overthway's green gate.

Click! Ida went up the white steps, marking them sadly with her wet feet, and gave a valiant rap. The door was opened, and a tall, rather severe-looking housekeeper asked:

"What do you want, my dear?"

A shyness, amounting to terror, had seized upon Ida, and she could hardly find voice to answer.

"If you please, I have brought these for——"

For whom? Ida's pale face burnt crimson as she remembered that after all she did not know the little old lady's name. Perhaps the severe housekeeper was touched by the sight of the black frock, torn as it was, for she said kindly:

"Don't be frightened, my dear. What do you want?"

"These primroses," said Ida, who was almost choking. "They are for Mrs. Overthway to take to church with her. I am very sorry, if you please, but I don't know her name, and I call her Mrs. Overthway because, you know, she lives over the way. At least——" Ida added, looking back across the road with a sudden confusion in her ideas, "at least—I mean—you know—we live over the way." And overwhelmed with shame at her own stupidity, Ida stuffed the flowers into the woman's hand, and ran home as if a lion were at her heels.

"WELL! Miss Ida," began Nurse, as Ida opened the nursery-door (and there was something terrible in her "well"); "if I ever——" and Nurse seized Ida by



"Will you tell me, please, where you got your primroses?" asked Ida. (P. 17.)

the arm, which was generally premonitory of her favourite method of punishment—"a good shaking." But Ida clung close and flung her arms round Nurse's neck.

"Don't shake me, Nursey, dear," she begged, "my head aches so. I have been very naughty, I know. I've done everything you can think of; I've crept through the hedge, and been right through the wood, and made a ford, and tumbled into the brook, and waded back, and run all the way home, and been round by the town for fear you should see me. And I've done something you could never, never think of if you tried till next Christmas, I've got some flowers for Mrs. Overthaway, only I did it so stupidly; she will think me a perfect goose, and perhaps be angry," and the tears came into Ida's eyes.

"She'll think you a naughty, troublesome child as you are," said Nurse, who seldom hesitated to assume the responsibility of any statement that appeared to be desirable; "you're mad on that old lady, I think. Just look at that dress!"

Ida looked, but her tears were falling much too fast for her to have a clear view of anything, and the torn edges of the rent seemed fringed with prismatic colours.

To crown all she was sent to bed. In reality, this was to save the necessity of wearing her best frock till the other was mended, and also to keep her warm in case she should have caught cold; but Nurse spoke of it as a punishment, and Ida wept accordingly. And this was a triumph of that not uncommon line of nursery policy which consists in elaborately misleading the infant mind for good.

Chim! chime! went the bells next morning, and Mrs. Overthaway came down the white steps and through the green gate with a bunch of primroses in her hand. She looked up as usual, but not to the sky. She looked to the windows of the houses over the way, as if she expected some one

to be looking for her. There was no face to be seen, however; and in the house directly opposite, one of the upper blinds was drawn down. Ida was ill.

How long she was ill, and of what was the matter with her, Ida had no very clear idea. She had visions of toiling through the wood over and over again, looking vainly for something that could never be found; of being suddenly surrounded and cut off by swollen streams; and of crawling, unclean beasts with preternatural feelers who got into her boots. Then these heavy dreams cleared away in part, and the stream seemed to ripple like the sound of church bells, and these chimed out the old tune

"Quite through the streets, with silver sound," &c.

And then, at last, she awoke one fine morning to hear the sweet chim-chiming of the church bells, and to see Nurse sitting by her bedside. She lay still for a few moments to make quite sure, and then asked in a voice so faint that it surprised herself:

"Has Mrs. Overthaway gone to church?"

On which, to her great astonishment, Nurse burst into tears. For this was the first reasonable sentence that poor Ida had spoken for several days.

To be very ill is not pleasant; but the slow process of getting back strength is often less pleasant still. One afternoon Ida knelt in her old place at the window. She was up, but might not go out, and this was a great grief. The day had been provokingly fine, and even now, though the sun was setting, it seemed inclined to make a fresh start, so bright was the rejuvenated glow with which it shone upon the opposite houses, and threw a mystic glory over Mrs. Overthaway's white steps and green railings. Oh! how Ida had wished to go out that afternoon! How long and clear the shadows were! It

seemed to Ida that whoever was free to go into the open air could have nothing more to desire. "Out of doors" looked like Paradise to the drooping little maid, and the passers-by seemed to go up and down the sunny street in a golden dream. Ida gazed till the shadows lengthened, and crept over the street and up the houses; till the sunlight died upon the railings, and then upon the steps, and at last lingered for half an hour in bright patches among the chimney-stacks, and then went out altogether, and left the world in shade.

Twilight came on and Ida sat by the fire, which rose into importance now that the sunshine was gone; and, moreover, spring evenings are cold.

Ida felt desolate, and, on the whole, rather ill-used. Nurse had not been upstairs for hours, and though she had promised real tea and toast this evening, there were no signs of either as yet. The poor child felt too weak to play, and reading made her eyes ache. If only there were some one to tell her a story.

It grew dark, and then steps came outside the door, and a fumbling with the lock which made Ida nervous.

"Do come in, Nursey!" she cried.

The door opened, and some one spoke; but the voice was not the voice of Nurse. It was a sweet, clear, gentle voice; musical, though no longer young; such a voice as one seldom hears and never forgets, which came out of the darkness, saying:

"It is not Nurse, my dear; she is making the tea, and gave me leave to come up alone. I am Mrs. Overthaway."

And there in the firelight stood the little old lady, as she has been before described, except that instead of her Prayer-book she carried a large pot hyacinth in her two little hands.

"I have brought you one of my pets, my dear," said she. "I think we both love flowers."

The little old lady had come to tea. This was charming. She took off her bonnet, and her cap more than fulfilled Ida's expectations, although it was nothing smarter than a soft mass of tulle, tied with white satin strings. But what a face looked out of it! Mrs. Overthaway's features were almost perfect. The beauty of her eyes was rather enhanced by the blue shadows that Time had painted round them, and they were those good eyes which remind one of a clear well, at the bottom of which he might see truth. When young she must have been exquisitely beautiful, Ida thought. She was lovely still.

In due time Nurse brought up tea, and Ida could hardly believe that her fancies were realized at last; indeed more than realized—for no bread-and-treacle diminished the dignity of the entertainment; and Nurse would as soon have thought of carrying off the Great Mogul on his cushions, as of putting Mrs. Overthaway and her chair into the corner.

But there is a limit even to the space of time for which one can enjoy tea and buttered toast. The tray was carried off; the hyacinth put in its place, and Ida curled herself up in an easy-chair on one side of the fire, Mrs. Overthaway being opposite.

"You see I am over the way still," laughed the little old lady. "Now, tell me all about the primroses." So Ida told everything, and apologized for her awkward speeches to the housekeeper.

"I don't know your name yet," said she.

"Call me Mrs. Overthaway still, my dear, if you please," said the little old lady. "I like it."

So Ida was no wiser on this score.

"I was so sorry to hear that you had been made ill on my account," said Mrs. Overthaway. "I have been many times to ask after you, and to-night I asked leave to come to tea. I wish I could do some-

thing to amuse you, you poor little invalid. I know you must feel dull."

Ida's cheek flushed.

"If you would only tell me a story," she said, "I do so like hearing Nurse's stories. At least she has only one, but I like it. It isn't exactly a story either, but it is about what happened in her last place. But I am rather tired of it. There's Master Henry—I like him very much, he was always in mischief; and there's Miss Adelaide, whose hair curled naturally—at least with a damp brush—I like her; but I don't have much of them; for Nurse generally goes off about a quarrel she had with the cook, and I never could tell what they quarrelled about, but Nurse said cook was full of malice and deceitfulness, so she left. I am rather tired of it."

"What sort of a story shall I tell you?" asked Mrs. Overtheday.

"A true one, I think," said Ida. "Something that happened to you yourself, if you please. You must remember a great many things, being so old."

And Ida said this in simple good faith, believing it to be a compliment.

"It is quite true," said Mrs. Overtheday, "that one remembers many things at the end of a long life, and that they are often those things which happened a long while ago, and which are sometimes so slight in themselves that it is wonderful that they should not have been forgotten. I remember, for instance, when I was about your age, an incident that occurred which gave me an intense dislike to a special shade of brown satin. I hated it then, and at the end of more than half a century, I hate it still. The thing in itself was a mere

folly; the people concerned with it have been dead for many years, and yet at the present time I should find considerable difficulty in seeing the merits of a person who should dress in satin of that peculiar hue."

"What was it?" asked Ida.

"It was not amber satin, and it was not snuff-coloured satin; it was one of the shades of brown known by the name of *feuille-morte*, or dead-leaf colour. It is pretty in itself, and yet I dislike it."

"How funny," said Ida, wriggling in the arm-chair with satisfaction. "Do tell me about it."

"But it is not funny in the least, unfortunately," said Mrs. Overtheday, laughing. "It isn't really a story, either. It is not even like Nurse's experiences. It is only a strong remembrance of my childhood, that isn't worth repeating, and could hardly amuse you."

"Indeed, indeed it would," said Ida. "I like the sound of it. Satin is so different from cooks."

Mrs. Overtheday laughed.

"Still, I wish I could think of something more entertaining," said she.

"Please tell me that," said Ida, earnestly; "I would rather hear something about you than anything else."

There was no resisting this loving argument. Ida felt that she had gained her point, and curled herself up into a listening attitude accordingly. The hyacinth stood in solemn sweetness as if it were listening also; and Mrs. Overtheday, putting her little feet upon the fender to warm, began the story of ———

MRS. MOSS.

"It did not move my grief, to see
The trace of human step departed,
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me !

"Friends, blame me not ! a narrow ken
Hath childhood 'twixt the sun and sward :
We draw the moral afterward—
We feel the gladness then."

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

MRS. MOSS.

I REMEMBER," said Mrs. Overtheway, "old as I am, I remember distinctly many of the unrecognized vexations, longings, and disappointments of childhood. By unrecognized, I mean those vexations, longings, and disappointments which could not be understood by nurses, are not confided even to mothers, and through which, even in our cradles, we become subject to that law of humanity which gives to every heart its own secret bitterness to be endured alone. These are they which sometimes outlive weightier memories, and produce life-long impressions disproportionate to their value; but oftener, perhaps, are washed away by the advancing tide of time,—the vexations, longings, and disappointments of the next period of our lives. These are they which are apt to be forgotten too soon to benefit our children, and which in the forgetting make childhood all bright to look back upon, and foster that happy fancy that there is one division of mortal life in which greedy desire, unfulfilled purpose, envy, sorrow, weariness, and satiety, have no part, by which every man believes himself at least to have been happy as a child.

"My childhood on the whole was a very happy one. The story that I am about to relate is only a fragment of it.

"As I look into the fire, and the hot coals shape themselves into a thousand memories of the past, I seem to be staring with childish eyes at a board that stares back at me out of a larch plantation, and

gives notice that 'This House is to Let.' Then, again, I seem to peep through rusty iron gates at the house itself—an old red house, with large windows, through which one could see the white shutters that were always closed. To look at this house, though only with my mind's eye, recalls the feeling of mysterious interest with which I looked at it more than fifty years ago, and brings back the almost oppressive happiness of a certain day, when Sarah, having business with the couple who kept the empty manor, took me with her, and left me to explore the grounds whilst she visited her friends.

"Next to a companion with that rare sympathy of mind to mind, that exceptional coincidence of tastes, which binds some few friendships in a chain of mercuric links, supplanting all the complacencies of love by intuition, is a companion whose desires and occupations are in harmony, if not in unison, with one's own. That friend whom the long patience of the angler does not chafe, the protracted pleasures of the sketcher do not weary, because time flies as swiftly with him whilst he pores over his book, or devoutly seeks botanical specimens through the artist's middle distance; that friend, in short—that valuable friend—who is blessed with the great and good quality of riding a hobby of his own, and the greater and better quality of allowing other people to ride theirs.

"I did not think out all this fifty years

ago, neither were the tastes of that excellent housemaid, Sarah, quite on a level with those of which I have spoken; but I remember feeling the full comfort of the fact that Sarah's love for friendly gossip was quite as ardent as mine for romantic discovery; that she was disposed to linger quite as long to chat as I to explore; and that she no more expected me to sit wearily through her kitchen confidences, than I imagined that she would give a long afternoon to sharing my day-dreams in the gardens of the deserted manor.

"We had ridden our respective hobbies till nearly tea-time before she appeared.

"'I'm afraid you must be tired of waiting, Miss Mary,' said she.

"'Tired!' I exclaimed, 'not in the least. I have been so happy, and I am so much obliged to you, Sarah.'

"Need I say why I was so happy that afternoon? Surely most people have felt—at least in childhood—the fascination of deserted gardens, uninhabited houses, ruined churches. They have that advantage over what is familiar and in use that undiscovered regions have over the comfortable one that the traveller leaves to explore them, that the secret which does not concern me has over the facts which do, that what we wish for has over what we possess.

"If you, my dear, were to open one of those drawers, and find Nurse's Sunday dress folded up in the corner, it would hardly amuse you; but if, instead thereof, you found a dress with a long stiff bodice, square at the neck, and ruffled round the sleeves, such as you have seen in old pictures, no matter how old or useless it might be, it would shed round it an atmosphere of delightful and mysterious speculation. This curiosity, these fancies, roused by the ancient dress, whose wearer has passed away, are awakened equally by empty houses where some one must once

have lived, though his place knows him no more. It was so with the manor. How often had I peeped through the gates, catching sight of garden walks, and wondering whither they led, and who had walked in them; seeing that the shutters behind one window were partly open, and longing to look in!

"To-day I had been in the walks and peeped through the window. This was the happiness.

"Through the window I had seen a large hall with a marble floor and broad stone stairs winding upwards into unknown regions. By the walks I had arrived at the locked door of the kitchen garden, at a small wood or wilderness of endless delights (including a broken swing), and at a dilapidated summer-house. I had wandered over the spongy lawn, which was cut into a long green promenade by high clipt yew-hedges, walking between which, in olden times, the ladies grew erect and stately, as plants among brushwood stretch up to air and light.

"Finally, I had brought away such relics as it seemed to me that honesty would allow. I had found half a rusty pair of scissors in the summer-house. Perhaps some fair lady of former days had lost them here, and swept distractedly up and down the long walks seeking them. Perhaps they were a present, and she had given a luck-penny for them, lest they should cut love. Sarah said the house-keeper might have dropped them there; but Sarah was not a person of sentiment. I did not show her the marble I found by the hedge, the acorn I picked up in the park, nor a puny pansy which, half way back to a wild heartsease, had touched me as a pathetic memorial of better days. When I got home, I put the scissors, the marble, and the pansy into a box. The acorn I hung in a bottle of water—it was to be an oak tree.

"Properly speaking, I was not at home just then, but on a visit to my grandmother and a married aunt without children who lived with her. A fever had broken out in my own home, and my visit here had been prolonged to keep me out of the way of infection. I was very happy and comfortable except for one signal vexation, which was this:

"I slept on a little bed in what had once been the nursery, a large room which was now used as a work-room. A great deal of sewing was done in my grandmother's house, and the sewing-maid and at least one other of the servants sat there every evening. A red silk screen was put before my bed to shield me from the candle-light, and I was supposed to be asleep when they came upstairs. But I never remember to have been otherwise than wide awake, nervously awake, wearily awake. This was the vexation. I was not a strong child, and had a very excitable brain; and the torture that it was to hear those maids gossiping on the other side of the dim red light of my screen I cannot well describe, but I do most distinctly remember. I tossed till the clothes got hot, and threw them off till I got cold, and stopped my ears, and pulled the sheet over my face, and tried not to listen, and listened in spite of all. They told long stories, and made many jokes that I couldn't understand; sometimes I heard names that I knew, and fancied I had learnt some wonderful secret. Sometimes, on the contrary, I made noises to intimate that I was awake, when one of them would re-arrange my glaring screen, and advise me to go to sleep, and then they talked in whispers, which was more distracting still.

"One evening—some months after my ramble round the manor—the maids went out to tea, and I lay in peaceful silence watching the shadows which crept noiselessly about the room as the fire blazed,

and wishing Sarah and her colleagues nothing less than a month of uninterrupted tea-parties. I was almost asleep when Aunt Harriet came into the room. She brought a candle, put up my screen (the red screen again!) and went to the work-table. She had not been rustling with the work things for many minutes when my grandmother followed her, and shut the door with an air which seemed to promise a long stay. She also gave a shove to my screen, and then the following conversation began:

"'I have been to Lady Sutfield's to-day, Harriet.'

"'Indeed, ma'am.' But my aunt respectfully continued her work, as I could hear by the scraping of the scissors along the table.

"'I heard some news there. The manor is let.'

"'I almost jumped in my bed, and Aunt Harriet's scissors paused.

"'Let, ma'am! To whom?'

"'To a Mrs. Moss. You must have heard me speak of her. I knew her years ago, when we were both young women. Anastatia Eden, she was then.'

"'I could hear my aunt move to the fire, and sit down.

"'The beautiful Miss Eden? Whom did she marry at last? Was there not some love-affair of hers that you knew about?'

"'Her love-affairs were endless. But you mean Mr. Sandford. She treated him ill—very ill.'

"'There was a pause, while the fire crackled in the silence; and then, to the infinite satisfaction of my curiosity, Aunt Harriet said:

"'I've forgotten the story, ma'am. He was poor, was he not?'

"'He had quite enough to marry on,' my grandmother answered, energetically, 'but he was not a great match. It was the

old story, my dear. The world! The world! The world! I remember sitting up with Anastatia after a ball, where he had been at her side all the evening. We sipped hot posset, and talked of our partners. Ah, dear!' And here my grandmother heaved a sigh; partly, perhaps, because of the follies of youth, and partly, perhaps, because youth had gone, and could come back no more.

"Anastatia talked of him,' she continued. 'I remember her asking me if "her man" were not a pretty fellow, and if he had not sweet blue eyes and the greatest simplicity I ever knew but in a child. It was true enough; and he was a great deal more than that—a great deal more than she ever understood. Poor Anastatia! I advised her to marry him, but she seemed to look on that as impossible. I remember her saying that it would be different if she were not an acknowledged beauty; but it was expected that she would marry well, and he was comparatively poor, and not even singular. He was accomplished, and the soul of honour, but simple, provokingly simple, with no pretensions to carry off the toast of a county. My dear, if he had been notorious in any way—for dissipation, for brawling, for extravagance—I believe it would have satisfied the gaping world, and he would have had a chance. But there was nothing to talk about, and Anastatia had not the courage to take him for himself. She had the world at her feet, and paid for it by being bound by its opinion.'

"Here my grandmother, who was apt to moralize, especially when relating biographies of young ladies, gave another sigh.

"Then why did she encourage him?' inquired Aunt Harriet; who also moralized, but with more of indignation and less of philosophy.

"I believe she loved him in spite of

herself; but at the last, when he offered, she turned prudent and refused him.'

"Poor man! Did he ever marry?'

"Yes, and very happily—a charming woman. But the strange part of the story is, that he came quite unexpectedly into a large property that was in his family.'

"Did he? Then he would have been as good a match as most of her admirers?'

"Better. It was a fine estate. Poor Anastatia!'

"Serve her right,' said my aunt, shortly.

"She was very beautiful,' my grandmother gently recommenced. She said this, not precisely as an excuse, but with something of the sort in her tone. 'Very beautiful! How stately she did look that night, to be sure! She did not paint, and her complexion (a shade too high by day) was perfection by candlelight. I can see her now, my dear, as she stood up for a minuet with him. We wore hoops, then; and she had a white brocade petticoat, embroidered with pink rosebuds, and a train and bodice of pea-green satin, and green satin shoes with pink heels. You never saw anything more lovely than that brocade. A rich old aunt had given it to her. The shades of the rosebuds were exquisite. I embroidered the rosebuds on that salmon-coloured cushion downstairs from a piece that Anastatia gave me as a pattern. Dear me! What a dress it was, and how lovely she looked in it! Her eyes were black, a thing you rarely see, and they shone and glittered under her powdered hair. She had a delicately curved nose; splendid teeth, too, and showed them when she smiled. Then such a lovely throat, and beautifully-shaped arms! I don't know how it is, my dear Harriet,' added my grandmother, thoughtfully, 'but you don't see the splendid women now-a-days that there were when I was young. There are plenty of pretty,

lively girls (rather too lively in my old-fashioned judgment), but not the real stately beauty that it was worth a twenty miles' drive there and back, just to see, at one of the county balls.'

"My aunt sniffed, partly from a depressing consciousness of being one of a degenerate generation, and of a limited experience in the matter of county balls; partly also to express her conviction that principle is above beauty. She said:

" 'Then Miss Eden married, ma'am?'

" 'Yes, rather late, Mr. Moss; a wealthy Indian merchant, I believe. She lost all her children, I know, one after another, and then he died. Poor Anastatia! It seems like yesterday. And to think she should be coming here!'

"My grandmother sighed again, and I held my breath, hoping for some further particulars of the lovely heroine of this romance. But I was disappointed. My uncle's voice at this moment called loudly from below, and Aunt Harriet hurried off with a conscious meritoriousness about her becoming a lady who had married the right man, and took great care of him.

" 'Supper, ma'am, I think,' she said, as she left the room.

"My grandmother sat still by the fire, sighing gently now and then, and I lay making up my mind to brave all and tell her that I was awake. In the first place (although I was not intentionally eavesdropping, and my being awake was certainly not my fault), I felt rather uneasy at having overheard what I knew was not intended for my hearing. Besides this, I wanted to hear some more stories of the lovely Mrs. Moss, and to ask how soon she would come to the manor. After a few seconds my grandmother rose and toddled across the room. I made an effort, and spoke just above my breath:

" 'Granny!'

"But my grandmother was rather deaf.

Moreover, my voice may have been drowned in the heavy sigh with which she closed the nursery door.

"The room was empty again; the glare of the red screen was tenderly subdued in the firelight; but for all this I did not go to sleep. I took advantage of my freedom to sit up in bed, toss my hair from my forehead, and clasping my knees with my arms, to rock myself and think. My thoughts had one object; my whole mind was filled with one image—Mrs. Moss. The future inhabitant of my dear deserted manor would, in any circumstances, have been an interesting subject for my fancies. The favoured individual whose daily walk might be between the yew hedges on that elastic lawn; who should eat, drink, and sleep through the commonplace hours of this present time behind those mystical white shutters! But when the individual added to this felicitous dispensation of fortune the personal attributes of unparalleled beauty and pea-green satin; of having worn high hoops, high heels, and powder; of countless lovers, and white brocade with pink rosebuds;—well might I sit, my brain whirling with anticipation, as I thought: 'She is coming here: I shall see her!' For though, of course, I knew that having lived in those (so to speak) prehistoric times when my old grandmother was young, Mrs. Moss must now be an aged woman; yet, strange as it may seem, my dear, I do assure you that I never realized the fact. I thought of her as I had heard of her—young and beautiful—and modelled my hopes accordingly.

'Most people's day-dreams take, sooner or later, a selfish turn. I seemed to identify myself with the beautiful Anastatia. I thought of the ball as one looks back to the past. I fancied myself moving through the *minuet de la cour*, whose stately paces scarcely made the silken rosebuds rustle. I rejected *en masse* countless suitors of

fabulous wealth and nobility ; but when it came to Mr. Sandford, I could feel with Miss Eden no more. My grandmother had said that she loved him, that she encouraged him, and that she gave him up for money. It was a mystery ! In her place, I thought, I would have danced every dance with him ; I would have knitted for him in winter, and gathered flowers for him in the summer hedges. To whom should one be most kind, if not to those whom one most loves ? To love, and take pleasure in giving pain—to balance a true heart and clear blue eyes against money, and prefer money—was not at that time comprehensible by me. I pondered, and (so to speak) spread out the subject before my mind, and sat in judgment upon it.

“Money—that is, golden guineas (my grandmother had given me one on my birthday), crowns, shillings, sixpences, pennies, halfpennies, farthings ; and when you come to consider how many things a guinea judiciously expended in a toy-shop will procure, you see that money is a great thing, especially if you have the full control of it, and are not obliged to spend it on anything useful.

“On the other hand, those whom you love, and who love you—not in childhood, thank God, the smallest part of one’s acquaintance.

“I made a list on my own account. It began with my mother, and ended with my yellow cat. (It included a crusty old gardener, who was at times, especially in the spring, so particularly cross that I *might* have been tempted to exchange *him* for the undisputed possession of that stock of seeds, tools, and flowerpots which formed our chief subject of dispute. But this is a digression.) I took the lowest. Could I part with Sandy Tom for any money, or for anything that money would buy ? I thought of a speaking doll, a miniature piano, a tiny carriage drawn by four yellow

mastiffs, of a fairy purse that should never be empty, with all that might thereby be given to others or kept for oneself : and then I thought of Sandy Tom—of his large, round, soft head ; his fine eyes (they were yellow, not blue, and glared with infinite tenderness) ; his melodious purr ; his expressive whiskers ; his incomparable tail.

“Love rose up as an impulse, an instinct ; it would not be doubted, it utterly refused to be spread out to question.

“‘Oh, Puss !’ I thought, ‘if you could but leap on to the bed at this moment I would explain it all to our mutual comprehension and satisfaction. My dear Sandy,’ I would say, ‘with you to lie on the cushioned seat, a nice little carriage, and four yellow mastiffs, would be perfection ; but as to comparing what I love—to wit, you, Sandy!—with what I want—to wit, four yellow mastiffs and a great many other things besides—I should as soon think of cutting off your tail to dust the doll’s house with.’ Alas ! Sandy Tom was at home ; I could only imagine the gentle rub of the head with which he would have assented. Meanwhile, I made up my mind firmly on one point. My grandmother was wrong. Miss Anastatia Eden had not loved Mr. Sandford.

“Smash ! The fire, which had been gradually becoming hollow, fell in at this moment, and I started to find myself chilly and cramped ; and so lay down. Then my thoughts took another turn. I wondered if I should grow up beautiful, like Mrs. Moss. It was a serious question. I had often looked at myself in the glass, but I had a general idea that I looked much like other little girls of my age. I began gravely to examine myself in detail, beginning from the top of my head. My hair was light, and cropped on a level with the lobes of my ears ; this, however, would amend itself with time ; and

I had long intended that my hair should be of raven blackness, and touch the ground at least; 'but that will not be till I am grown up,' thought I. Then my eyes: they were large; in fact the undue proportions they assumed when I looked ill or tired formed a family joke. If size were all that one requires in eyes, mine would certainly pass muster. Moreover, they had long curly lashes. I fingered these slowly, and thought of Sandy's whiskers. At this point I nearly fell asleep, but roused myself to examine my nose. My grandmother had said that Mrs. Moss's nose was delicately curved. Now, it is certainly true that a curve may be either concave or convex; but I had heard of the bridge of a nose, and knew well enough which way the curve should go; and I had a shrewd suspicion that if so very short a nose as mine, and with so round a tip, could be said to be curved at all, the curve went the wrong way; at the same time, I could not feel sure. For I must tell you that to lie in a comfortable bed, at an hour long beyond the time when one ought naturally to be asleep, and to stroke one's nose, is a proceeding not favourable to forming a clear judgment on so important a point as one's personal appearance. The very shadows were still as well as silent, the fire had ceased to flicker, a delicious quietude pervaded the room, as I stroked my nose and dozed, and dozed and stroked my nose, and lost all sense of its shape, and fancied it a huge lump growing under my fingers.—The extreme unpleasantness of this idea just prevented my falling asleep; and I roused myself and sat up again.

"'It's no use feeling,' I thought, 'I'll look in the glass.'

"There was one mirror in the room. It hung above the mantelpiece. It was old, deeply framed in dark wood, and was so hung as to slope forwards into the room.

"In front of the fire stood an old-fashioned, cushioned armchair, with a very high back, and a many-frilled chintz cover. A footstool lay near it. It was here that my grandmother had been sitting. I jumped out of bed, put the footstool into the chair that I might get to a level with the glass, and climbed on to it. Thanks to the slope of the mirror, I could now see my reflection as well as the dim fire-light would permit.

"'What a silly child!' you will say, Ida. Very silly, indeed, my dear. And how one remembers one's follies! At the end of half a century, I recall my reflection in that old nursery mirror more clearly than I remember how I looked in the glass before which I put on my bonnet this evening to come to tea with you: the weird, startled glance of my eyes, which, in their most prominent stage of weariness, gazed at me out of the shadows of the looking-glass, the tumbled tufts of hair, the ghostly effect of my white night-dress. As to my nose, I could absolutely see nothing of its shape; the firelight just caught the round tip, which shone like a little white toadstool from the gloom, and this was all.

"'One can't see the shape, full face,' I thought. 'If I had only another looking-glass.'

"But there was not another. I knew it, and yet involuntarily looked round the room. Suddenly I exclaimed aloud, 'Mr. Joseph will do!'

"Who was Mr. Joseph—you will ask. My dear Ida, I really do not know. I have not the least idea. I had heard him called Mr. Joseph, and I fancy he was a connection of the family. All I knew of him was his portrait, a *silhouette*, deeply framed in black wood, which hung against the nursery wall. I was ignorant of his surname and history. I had never examined his features. But I knew

that happily he had been very stout, since his ample coat and waistcoat, cut out in black paper, converted the glass which covered them into an excellent mirror for my dolls.

"Worthy Mr. Joseph! Here he was coming in useful again. How much we owe to our forefathers! I soon unhooked him, and climbing back into the chair, commenced an examination of my profile by the process of double reflection. But all in vain! Whether owing to the dusty state of the mirror, or to the dim light, or to the unobliging shapeliness of Mr. Joseph's person, I cannot say, but turn and twist as I would, I could not get a view of my profile sufficiently clear and complete to form a correct judgment upon. I held Mr. Joseph, now high, now low; I stooped, I stood on tiptoe, I moved forward, I leant backward. It was this latest manoeuvre that aggravated the natural topheaviness of the chair, and endangered its balance. The fore-legs rose, my spasmodic struggle was made in the wrong direction, and I, the armchair, and Mr. Joseph fell backwards together.

"Two of us were light enough, and happily escaped unhurt. It was the armchair which fell with such an appalling crash, and whether it were any the worse or no, I could not tell as it lay. As soon as I had a little recovered from the shock, therefore, I struggled to raise it, whilst Mr. Joseph lay helplessly upon the ground, with his waistcoat turned up to the ceiling.

"It was thus that my aunt found us.

"If only Mr. Joseph and I had fallen together, no one need have been the wiser; but that lumbering armchair had come down with a bump that startled the sober trio at supper in the dining-room below.

"What *is* the matter?" said Aunt Harriet.

"I was speechless.

"What have you been doing?"

"I couldn't speak; but accumulating misfortune was gradually overpowering me, and I began to cry.

"Get into bed," said Aunt Harriet.

"I willingly obeyed, and Aunt Harriet seated herself at the foot.

"Now, think before you speak, Mary," she said quietly, 'and then tell me the truth. What have you been doing?'

"One large tear rolled over my nose and off the tip as I feebly began—

"I got into the chair—"

"Well?" said Aunt Harriet.

"—to look in the glass."

"What for?" said Aunt Harriet.

"Tears flowed unrestrainedly over my face as I howled in self-abasement—

"To look at the shape of my nose."

"At this point Aunt Harriet rose, and turning her back rather abruptly, crossed the room, and picked up Mr. Joseph. (I have since had reason to believe that she was with difficulty concealing a fit of laughter.)

"What have you had this picture down for?" she inquired, still with her back to me.

"I couldn't see," I sobbed, 'and I got Mr. Joseph to help me.'

"My aunt made no reply, and still carefully concealing her face, restored Mr. Joseph to his brass nail with great deliberation.

"There is nothing like full confession. I broke the silence.

"Aunt Harriet, I was awake when you and Granny were here, and heard what you said."

"You are a very silly, naughty child," my aunt severely returned. 'Why don't you go to sleep when you are sent to bed?'

"I can't," I sobbed, 'with talking and candles.'

"You've got the screen," said Aunt

Harriet ; and I cannot tell why, but somehow I lacked courage to say that the red screen was the chief instrument of torture.

" 'Well, go to sleep now,' she concluded, 'and be thankful you're not hurt. You might have killed yourself.'

" Encouraged by the gracious manner in which she tucked me up, I took a short cut to the information which I had failed to attain through Mr. Joseph.

" 'Aunt Harriet,' I said, 'do you think I shall ever be as beautiful as Mrs. Moss?'

" 'I'm ashamed of you,' said Aunt Harriet.

" I climbed no more into the treacherous armchair. I eschewed the mirror. I left Mr. Joseph in peace upon the wall. I took no further trouble about the future prospects of my nose. But night and day I thought of Mrs. Moss. I found the old cushion, and sat by it, gazing at the faded tints of the rosebuds, till I imagined the stiff brocade in all its beauty and freshness. I took a vigorous drawing fit ; but it was only to fill my little book with innumerable sketches of Mrs. Moss. My uncle lent me his paint-box, as he was wont ; and if the fancy portraits that I made were not satisfactory even to myself, they failed in spite of cheeks blushing with vermilion, in spite of eyes as large and brilliant as lamp-black could make them, and in spite of the most accurately curved noses that my pencil could produce. The amount of gamboge and Prussian blue that I wasted in vain efforts to produce a satisfactory pea-green, leaves me at this day an astonished admirer of my uncle's patience. At this time I wished to walk along no other road than that which led to my dear manor, where the iron gates were being painted, the garden made tidy, and the shutters opened ; but above all the chief object of my desires was to accompany my grandmother and aunt in their first visit to Mrs. Moss.

" Once I petitioned Aunt Harriet on this subject. Her answer was—

" 'My dear, there would be nothing to amuse you ; Mrs. Moss is an old woman.'

" 'Granny said she was so beautiful,' I suggested.

" 'So she was, my dear, when your grandmother was young.'

" These and similar remarks I heard and heeded not. They did not add one wrinkle to my ideal of Mrs. Moss : they in no way whatever lessened my desire to see her. I had never seen my grandmother young, and her having ever been so seemed to me at the most a matter of tradition ; on the other hand, Mrs. Moss had been presented to my imagination in the bloom of youth and beauty, and, say what they would, in the bloom of youth and beauty I expected to see her still.

" One afternoon, about a week after the arrival of Mrs. Moss, I was busy in the garden, where I had been working for an hour or more, when I heard carriage wheels drive up and stop at our door. Could it be Mrs. Moss? I stole gently round to a position where I could see without being seen, and discovered that the carriage was not that of any caller, but my uncle's. Then Granny and Aunt Harriet were going out. I rushed up to the coachman, and asked where they were going. He seemed in no way overpowered by having to reply—'To the manor, Miss.'

" That was to Mrs. Moss, and I was to be left behind ! I stood speechless in bitter disappointment, as my grandmother rustled out in her best silk dress, followed by Aunt Harriet and my uncle, who, when he saw me, exclaimed—

" 'Why, there's my little Mary ! Why don't you take her? I'll be bound she wants to go.'

" 'I do, indeed !' I exclaimed, in Cinderella-like tones.

"'But Mrs. Moss is such an old lady,' said Aunt Harriet, whose ideas upon children were purely theoretical, and who could imagine no interests for them apart from other children, from toys or definite amusements—'What could the child do with herself?'

"'Do!' said my uncle, who took a rough and cheery view of life, 'why, look about her, to be sure. And if Mrs. M. is an old lady, there'll be all the more Indian cabinets and screens, and japanned tables, and knick-knacks, and lapdogs. Keep your eyes open, Miss Mary; I've never seen the good lady or her belongings, but I'll stake my best hat on the japan ware and the lapdog. Now, how soon can you be dressed?'

"'Later in life the selfish element mixes more largely with our admirations. A few years thence, and in a first interview with the object of so many fancies, I should have thought as much of my own appearance on the occasion, as of what I was myself to see. I should have taken some pains with my toilette. At that time, the desire to see Mrs. Moss was too absorbing to admit of any purely personal considerations. I dashed into the nursery, scrubbed my hands and face to a raw red complexion, brushed my hair in three strokes, and secured my things with one sweep. I hastily pocketed a pincushion of red cloth, worked with yellow silk spots, in the likeness of a strawberry. It was a pet treasure of mine, and I intended it as an offering to Mrs. Moss. I tied my hood at the top of the stairs, fastened my tippet in the hall, and reached the family coach by about three of those bounds common to all young animals.

"'Halloa!' said my uncle, with his face through the carriage door. 'You've not thanked me yet.'

"'I flung my arms round his starched neckcloth.

"'You're a darling!' I exclaimed, with an emphatic squeeze.

"'You're another,' he replied, returning the embrace upon my hood.

"'With this mutual understanding we parted, and I thought that if Mrs. Moss were not certain to fulfil my ideal, I should have wished her to be as nearly like Uncle James as the circumstances of the case would permit. I watched his yellow waistcoat and waving hands till they could be seen no longer, and then I settled myself primly upon the back seat, and ventured upon a shy conciliating promise to be 'very good.'

"'You're quite welcome to come, child,' said Aunt Harriet; 'but as I said, there are neither children nor playthings for you.'

"'Children or playthings! What did I want with either? I put my arm through the loop by the window and watched the fields as they came and vanished, with vacant eyes, and thought of Mrs. Moss. A dozen times had I gone through the whole scene in my mind before we drove through the iron gates. I fancied myself in the bare, spacious hall, at which I had peeped; I seemed to hear a light laugh, and to see the beautiful face of Mrs. Moss look over the banisters; to hear a rustle, and the scraping of the stiff brocade, as the pink rosebuds shimmered, and the green satin shoes peeped out, and tap, tap, tap, the high pink heels resounded from the shallow stairs.

"'I had dreamed this day-dream many times over before the carriage stopped with a shake, and Aunt Harriet roused me, asking if I were asleep. In another minute or so we were in the hall, and here I met with my first disappointment.

"'To begin with, I had seen the hall unfurnished, and had not imagined it otherwise. I had pictured Mrs. Moss in her beauty and rose brocade, the sole ornament

of its cold emptiness. Then (though I knew that my grandmother and aunt must both be present) I had really fancied myself the chief character in this interview with Mrs. Moss. I had thought of myself as rushing up the stairs to meet her, and laying the pincushion at her green satin feet. And now that at last I was really in the hall, I should not have known it again. It was carpeted from end to end. Fragrant orange-trees stood in tubs, large hunting-pictures hung upon the walls, below which stood cases of stuffed birds, and over all presided a footman in livery, who himself looked like a stuffed specimen of the human race with unusually bright plumage.

"No face peeped over the banisters, and when we went upstairs, the footman went first (as seemed due to him), then my grandmother, followed by my aunt, and lastly I, in the humblest insignificance, behind them. My feet sank into the soft stair-carpet, I vacantly admired the elegant luxury around me, with an odd sensation of heartache. Everything was beautiful, but I had wanted nothing to be beautiful but Mrs. Moss.

"Already the vision began to fade. That full-fed footman troubled my fancies. His scarlet plush killed the tender tints of the rosebuds in my thoughts, and the streaky powder upon his hair seemed a mockery of the *toupée* I hoped to see, whose whiteness should enhance the lustre of rare black eyes. He opened the drawing-room door and announced my grandmother and aunt. I followed, and (so far as one may be said to face anything when one stands behind the skirts of two intervening elders) I was face to face with Mrs. Moss.

"That is, I was face to face with a tall, dark, old woman, with stooping shoulders, a hooked nose, black eyes that smouldered in their sunken sockets, and a distinct

growth of beard upon her chin. Mr. Moss had been dead many years and his widow had laid aside her weeds. She wore a dress of *feuille-morte* satin, and a black lace shawl. She had a rather elaborate cap with a tendency to get on one side, perhaps because it would not fit comfortably on the brown front with bunched curls which was fastened into its place by a band of broad black velvet.

"And this was Mrs. Moss! This was the end of all my fancies! There was nothing astonishing in the disappointment; the only marvel was that I should have indulged so foolish a fancy for so long. I had been told more than once that Mrs. Moss was as old as my grandmother. As it was she looked older. Why—I could not tell then, though I know now.

"My grandmother, though never a beauty, had a sweet smile of her own, and a certain occasional kindling of the eyes, the outward signs of a character full of sentiment and intelligence; and these had outlasted youth. She had always been what is called 'pleasing,' and she was pleasing still. But in Mrs. Moss no strength, no sentiment, no intellect filled the place of the beauty that was gone. Features that were powerful without character, and eyes that glowed without expression, formed a wreck with little to recall the loveliness which had bewildered Mr. Sandford—and me.

"There is not much more to tell, Ida. That was the disappointment. This is the cause of my dislike for a certain shade of *feuille-morte* satin. It disappointed me of that rose brocade which I was never to see. You shall hear how I got through the visit, however. This meeting which (like so many meetings) had proved the very reverse of what was hoped.

"Through an angle of Aunt Harriet's pelisse, I watched the meeting between my grandmother and Mrs. Moss. They kissed

and then drew back and looked at each other, still holding hands. I wondered if my grandmother felt as I felt. I could not tell. With one of her smiles, she bent forward and, kissing Mrs. Moss again, said,

"God bless you, Anastatia."

"God bless you, Elizabeth."

"It was the first time Mrs. Moss had spoken, and her voice was rather gruff. Then both ladies sat down, and my grandmother drew out her pocket-handkerchief and wiped her eyes. Mrs. Moss began (as I thought) to look for hers, and not finding it, called

'Metcalfe!'

on which a faded little woman, with a forefinger in a faded-looking book, came out from behind some window-curtains and rummaging Mrs. Moss's chair with a practised hand, produced a large silver snuff-box, from which Mrs. Moss took a pinch, and then offered it to Granny, who shook her head. Mrs. Moss took another and a larger pinch. It was evident what made her voice so gruff.

"Aunt Harriet was introduced as 'My daughter Harriet,' and made a stiff curtsy as Mrs. Moss smiled, and nodded, and bade her 'sit down, my dear.' Throughout the whole interview she seemed to be looked upon by both ladies as a child, and played the part so well, sitting prim and silent on her chair, that I could hardly help humming as I looked at her:

'Hold up your head,
Turn out your toes,
Speak when you're spoken to,
Mend your clothes.'

I was introduced, too, as 'a grandchild,' made a curtsy the shadow of Aunt Harriet's, received a nod, the shadow of that bestowed upon her, and got out of the way as soon as I could, behind my aunt's chair, where coming unexpectedly upon three fat

pug-dogs on a mat, I sat down among them and felt quite at home.

"The sight of the pugs brought Uncle James to my mind, and when I looked round the room, it seemed to me that he must be a conjuror at least, so true was everything he had said. A large Indian screen hid the door; japanned boxes stood on a little table to correspond in front of it, and there were two cabinets having shallow drawers with decorated handles, and a great deal of glass, through which odd teacups, green dragons, Indian gods, and Dresden shepherdesses were visible upon the shelves. The room was filled with knickknacks, and here were the pug-dogs, no less than three of them! They were very fat, and had little beauty except as to their round heads, and black wrinkled snouts, which I kissed over and over again.

"Do you mind Mrs. Moss's being old, and dressing in that hideous brown dress?' I asked in a whisper at the ear of one of these round heads. 'Think of the rose-buds on the brocade, and the pea-green satin, and the high-heeled shoes. Ah!' I added, 'you are only a pug, and pugs don't think.' Nevertheless, I pulled out the pincushion, and showed it to each dog in turn, and the sight of it so forcibly reminded me of my vain hopes, that I could not help crying. A hot tear fell upon the nose of the oldest and fattest pug, which so offended him that he moved away to another mat at some distance, and as both the others fell fast asleep, I took refuge in my own thoughts.

"The question arose why should not Mrs. Moss have the pincushion after all? I had expected her to be young and beautiful, and she had proved old and ugly, it is true; but there is no reason why old and ugly people should not have cushions to keep their pins in. It was a struggle to part with my dear strawberry pincushion in

the circumstances, but I had fairly resolved to do so, when the rustle of leave-taking began, and I had to come out of my corner.

"'Bid Mrs. Moss good-day, Mary,' said my grandmother; and added, 'the child has been wild to come and see you, Anastatia.'

"Mrs. Moss held out her hand good-naturedly. 'So you wanted to see me, my dear?' said she.

"I took my hand out of my pocket, where I had been holding the pincushion, and put both into Mrs. Moss's palm.

"'I brought this for you, ma'am,' I said. 'It is not a real strawberry; it is emery; I made it myself.'

"And the fact of having sacrificed something for Mrs. Moss made me almost fond of her. Moreover, there was an expression in her eyes at that moment which gave them beauty. She looked at my grandmother and laid her hand on my head.

"'I lost all mine, Elizabeth.'

"I thought she was speaking of her pincushions, and being in a generous mood, said hastily,

"'When that is worn out, ma'am, I will make you another.'

"But she was speaking of her children. Poor Mrs. Moss! She took another huge pinch of snuff, and called, 'Metcalf.'

"The faded little woman appeared once more.

"'I must give you a keepsake in return, my dear,' said Mrs. Moss. 'The china pug, Metcalf!'

"Metcalf (whose face always wore a smile that looked as if it were just about to disappear, and who, indeed, for that matter always looked as if she were just about to disappear herself) opened one of the cabinets, and brought out a little toy pug in china, very delicately coloured, and looking just like one of my friends on the mat. I fell in love with it at once, and

it was certainly a handsome exchange for the strawberry pincushion.

"'You will send the child to me now and then, Elizabeth?' said Mrs. Moss as we retired.

"In the end Mrs. Moss and I became great friends. I put aside my dream among the 'vain fancies' of life, and took very kindly to the manor in its new aspect. Even the stuffed footman became familiar, and learnt to welcome me with a smile. The real Mrs. Moss was a more agreeable person than I have, I fear, represented her. She had failed to grasp solid happiness in life, because she had chosen with the cowardice of an inferior mind; but she had borne disappointment with dignity, and submitted to heavy sorrows with patience; and a greater nature could not have done more. She was the soul of good humour, and the love of small chat, which contrasted so oddly with her fierce appearance, was a fund of entertainment for me, as I fed my imagination and stored my memory with anecdotes of the good old times in the many quiet evenings we spent together. I learnt to love her the more heartily, I confess, when she bought a new gown and gave the *feuille-morte* satin to Mrs. Metcalf.

"Mrs. Metcalf was 'humble companion' to Mrs. Moss. She was in reality single, but she exacted the married title as a point of respect. At the beginning of our acquaintance I called her 'Miss Metcalf,' and this occasioned the only check our friendship ever received. Now I would, with the greatest pleasure, have addressed her as 'My Lord Archbishop,' or in any other style to which she was not entitled, it being a matter of profound indifference to me. But the question was a serious one to her, and very serious she made it, till I almost despaired of our ever coming to an understanding on the subject.

"On every other point she was unassum-

ing almost to nonentity. She was weak-minded to the verge of mental palsy. She was more benevolent in deed, and more wandering in conversation, than any one I have met with since. That is, in ordinary life. In the greenhouse or garden (with which she and the head gardener alone had any real acquaintance) her accurate and profound knowledge would put to shame many professed garden botanists I have met with since. From her I learnt what little I know of the science of horticulture, and with her I spent many happy hours over the fine botanical works in the manor library, which she alone ever opened.

"And so I became reconciled to things as they were, though to this day I connect with that shade of *feuille-morte* satin a disappointment not to be forgotten.

* * * *

"It is a dull story, is it not, Ida?" said the little old lady, pausing here. She had not told it in precisely these words, but this was the sum and substance of it.

Ida nodded. Not that she had thought the story dull, so far as she had heard it, and whilst she was awake; but she had fallen asleep, and so she nodded.

Mrs. Overthaway looked back at the fire, to which, indeed, she had been talking for some time past.

"A child's story," she thought. "A tale of the blind, wilful folly of childhood? Ah, my soul! Alas, my grown-up friends! Does the moral belong to childhood alone? Have manhood and womanhood no passionate, foolish longings, for which we blind ourselves to obvious truth, and of which the vanity does not lessen the disappointment? Do we not still toil after rosebuds to find *feuilles-mortes*?"

No voice answered Mrs. Overthaway's fanciful questions. The hyacinth nodded fragrantly on its stalk, and Ida nodded in her chair. She was fast asleep—happily asleep—with a smile upon her face.

The shadow nodded gently on the walls, and like a shadow the little old lady stole quietly away.

When Ida awoke, she found herself lying partly in the arm-chair, and partly in the arms of Nurse, who was lifting her up. A candle flared upon the table, by the fire stood an empty chair, and the heavy scent which filled the room was as sweet as the remembrance of past happiness. The little old lady had vanished, and, but for the hyacinth, Ida would almost have doubted whether her visit had not been a dream.

"Has Mrs. Overthaway been long gone, Nursey?" she asked, keeping her eyes upon the flower-pot.

"Ever so long!" said Nurse, "and here you've been snoring away, and the old lady's been downstairs, telling me how comfortably you were asleep, and she's coming again to-morrow evening, if you're good."

It was precisely twelve minutes since Mrs. Overthaway left the house, but Nurse was of a slightly exaggerative turn of mind, and few people speak exactly on the subject of time, especially when there is an opportunity of triumphing over someone who has been asleep before bed-time. The condition of Ida's being good was also the work of Nurse's own instructive fancy, but Ida caught eagerly at the welcome news of another visit.

"Then she is not angry with me for falling asleep, Nursey? I was so comfortable, and she has such a nice voice, I couldn't help it; I think I left off about the pugs. I wish I had a pug with a wrinkled black snout, don't you, Nursey?"

"I'm sure I don't, Miss Ida. My father kept all sorts of pigs, and we used to have one with a black snout and black spots, but it was as ugly as ugly could be; and I never could fancy the bacon would be fit to eat. You must have been dream-

ing, I'm sure; the old lady would never tell you about such rubbish, I know."

"It's pugs, not pigs, Nurse; and they're dogs, you know," said Ida, laughing. "How funny you are! And indeed she did tell me, I couldn't have dreamt it; I never dreamt anything so nice in my life."

"And never will, most likely," said Nurse, who was very skilful in concluding a subject which she did not want to discuss, and who was apt to do so by a rapid twist in the line of argument, which Ida would find somewhat bewildering. "But, dear Miss Ida," she continued, "do leave off clutching at that chair-arm, when I'm lifting you up; and your eyes 'll drop out of your head, if you go on staring like that."

Ida relaxed the nervous grasp, to which she had been impelled by her energy on the subject of the pugs, let down her eyebrows, and submitted to be undressed. The least pleasant part of this ceremony related to her hair. Ida's hair was dark, and soft, and smooth, but Nurse thought fit to make it wavy by damping and plaiting. She had heavy hands, and did not understand the art of brushing. Ida winced as the bristles struck vertically, and accommodated her head as best she might to the sharp tugs which formed part of the process of plaiting in Nurse's rather rough fingers. Perhaps, however, her mind may have been running a little upon grievances, which made her say:

"You know, Nurse, how you are always telling me I ought to be thankful for having things, and not having things, and——"

"I wish you'd talk sense, and not give way with your head so when I'm plaiting, Miss Ida," retorted Nurse, "having things, and not having things; I don't know what you mean."

"Well, you know, Nurse, the other day when I said I didn't like bread-and-treacle

treacle so long before, and soaked in, and you said I ought to be thankful that I had bread-and-treacle at all, and that I hadn't a wooden leg, and to eat anything I could get, like the old sailor-man at the corner; well, do you know, I've thought of something I *am* so thankful for, and that is that I haven't a red screen to my bed."

"I really do think, Miss Ida," said Nurse, "that you'll go out of your mind some day, with your outlandish fancies. And where you get them, I can't think. I'm sure I never put such things into your head."

Ida laughed again.

"Never mind, Nurse, it all belongs to the pug story. Am I done now? And when you've tucked me up, please, would you mind remembering to put the flower where I can see it when I wake?"

Nurse did as she was asked, and Ida watched the hyacinth till she fell asleep; and she slept well.

In the morning, she took her old post at the window. The little old lady had never seemed so long in making her appearance, nor the bells so slow to begin. Chim! chime! chim! chime! There they were at last, and there was Mrs. Overtheway. She looked up, waved a bunch of snowdrops, and went after the bells. Ida kissed her hand, and waved it over and over again, long after the little old lady was out of sight.

"There's a kiss for you, dear Mrs. Overtheway," she cried, "and kisses for your flowers, and your house, and everything belonging to you, and for the bells and the church, and everybody in it this morning, and ——"

But, at this point of universal benevolence, Nurse carried her off to breakfast.

The little old lady came to tea as before. She looked as well as ever, and Nurse was equally generous of the matter of tea and toast. Mrs. Overtheway told over again

what Ida had missed in the story of Mrs. Moss, and Ida apologized, with earnest distress, for her uncivil conduct in falling asleep.

"There I was snoring away, when you were telling me such a delightful story!" she exclaimed, penitently.

"Not snoring exactly, my dear," smiled the little old lady, "but you looked very happy."

"I thought Nursey said so," said Ida. "Well, I'm very glad. It would have been too rude. And you know I don't know how it was, for I *am* so fond of stories; I like nothing so well."

"Well, shall I try again?" said Mrs. Overthaway. "Perhaps I may find a more amusing one, and if it does put you to sleep, it won't do any harm. Indeed, I think the doctor will say I'm very good company for you."

"You are very good! That I can tell him," said Ida, fervently, "and please let it be about yourself again, if you can remember anything. I like true stories."

"Talking of snoring," said Mrs. Over-

thaway, "reminds me of something that happened in my youth, and it is true, though, do you know, it is a ghost story."

Ida danced in her chair.

"That is just what I should like!" she exclaimed: "Nurse has a ghost story, belonging to a farm-house, which she tells the housemaid, but she says she can't tell me till I am older, and I should so like to hear a ghost story, if it isn't too horrid."

"This ghost story isn't too horrid, I think," laughed the little old lady, "and if you will let me think a few minutes, and then forgive my prosy way of telling it, you shall have it at once."

There was a pause. The little old lady sat silent, and so sat Ida also, with her eyes intently fixed on Mrs. Overthaway's face, over which an occasional smile was passing.

"It's about a ghost who snored," said the little old lady, doubtfully.

"Delicious!" responded Ida. The two friends settled themselves comfortably, and in some such words as these was told the following story.

THE SNORING GHOST.

Clown. Madman, thou errest: I say there is no darkness but Ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog. . . . What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

Malvolio. That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

Clown. What thinkest thou of his opinion?

Malvolio I think nobly of the soul, and in no way approve his opinion.

Twelfth Night, iv. 2.

THE SNORING GHOST.

"I REMEMBER," said Mrs. Overtheway, "I remember my first visit. That is, I remember the occasion when I and my sister Fatima did, for the first time in our lives, go out visiting without our mother, or any grown-up person to take care of us."

"Do you remember your mother?" asked Ida.

"Quite well, my dear, I am thankful to say. The best and kindest of mothers!"

"Was your father alive, too?" Ida asked, with a sigh.

The old lady paused, pitying the anxious little face opposite, but Ida went on eagerly:

"Please, tell me what *he* was like."

"He was a good deal older than my mother, who had married very early. He was a very learned man. His tastes and accomplishments were many and various, and he was very young-hearted and enthusiastic in the pursuit of them all his life. He was apt to take up one subject of interest after another, and to be for the time completely absorbed in it. And, I must tell you, that whatever the subject might be, so long as his head was full of it, the house seemed full of it too. It influenced the conversation at meals, the habits of the household, the names of the pet animals, and even of the children. I was called Mary, in a fever of chivalrous enthusiasm for the fair and luckless Queen of Scotland, and Fatima received her name when the study of Arabic had brought about an eastern mania. My father had

wished to call her Shahrazád, after the renowned sultana of the 'Arabian Nights,' but when he called upon the curate to arrange for the baptism, that worthy man flatly rebelled. A long discussion ended in my father's making a list of eastern names, from which the curate selected that of Fatima as being least repugnant to the sobriety of the parish registers. So Fatima she was called, and as she grew up pale, and moon-faced, and dark-eyed, the name became her very well."

"Was it this Fatima who went out visiting with you?" asked Ida.

"Yes, my dear; and now as to the visit. The invitation came on my thirteenth birthday.

"One's birthday is generally a day of some importance. A very notable day whilst one is young, but less so when one is old, when one is being carried quickly through the last stages of life, and when it seems hardly worth while to count time so near the end of the journey. Even in youth, however, some birthdays are more important than others. I remember looking forward to my tenth birthday as to a high point of dignity and advancement; and the just pride of the occasion on which I first wrote my age with more figures than one. With similar feelings, I longed to be thirteen. The being able to write my age with two figures had not, after all, shed any special lustre upon life; but when I was 'in my teens' it must 'feel different somehow.' So I thought.

Moreover, this birthday was really to bring with it solid advantages. I was now to be allowed to read certain books of a more grown-up character than I had read hitherto, and to sit up till nine o'clock. I was to wear sandals to my shoes. My hair was henceforth to grow as long as I and the Fates would permit, and the skirts of my frocks were to take an inch in the same direction. 'In four more years,' I said to Fatima, as we sat on the eve of my birthday, discussing its manifold advantages, 'in four more years I shall be grown up. Miss Ansted was introduced at seventeen.' The prospect was illimitable.

"Do people always grow much on their birthdays?" asked one of the little ones. I had boasted in the nursery, that when I was thirteen I should be 'nearly grown up,' and I myself had hardly outlived the idea that on one's birthday one was a year older than on the previous day, and might naturally expect to have made a year's growth during the night.

"This birthday, however, produced no such striking change. As usual, the presents were charming; the wreath as lovely as Fatima's deft fingers could make it, the general holiday and pleasure-making almost too much of a good thing. Otherwise, there was little to mark it from other days in the year.

"Towards evening we were all sitting on the grass, the boys with their heads on the sisters' laps, and there had been an outcry for a story, to which no one had responded; partly, perhaps, because the exquisite air of evening seemed a sufficient delight, the stillness too profound to be lightly disturbed. We had remained for some time without speaking, and the idea was becoming general among the girls that the boys were napping, when the summer silence was broken by the distant footfalls of a horse upon the high road.

"Trotting!" observed one of the supposed sleepers. We were not, as a family, given to explanations, and we drew a few more breaths of the evening air in silence. Then someone said:

"We might make a story out of *that*, and fancy all sorts of things. Who is it? Where does he come from, and where is he going to?"

"It is a messenger from the seat of war," drawled the boy in my lap, without moving. Then, lifting his curly head for a moment, he cried, 'To horse! gentlemen, to horse! The enemy will be at Carter's Mill by midnight!'

"There was a pause; the solitary footfalls came nearer through the evening mists, and a small brother, of a quaint turn of mind, much given to the study of the historical portions of the Old Testament, sat up and said, slowly:

"It is one of Job's messengers. *The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.*"

"The other boys laughed, but he lay down again, as solemnly as he had risen.

"That was a foot-messenger," said my boy, contemptuously.

"It doesn't say so," retorted the small brother.

"Well, any way, the camels had been carried off—so what did he ride upon?"

"A squabble was imminent. I covered my boy's face with a handkerchief, to keep him quiet.

"Listen!" I said. 'It's the post. The mail from the north was stopped on the highway, but he has saved the bags, and is riding hard for London.'

"It's——"

"But the new suggestion was drowned in a general shout of—

"'It's coming up the lane!'

"The footfalls had diverged from the main road, and were coming up the sandy lane that skirted our wall. The boys lifted their heads, and we sat expectant. There was a pause, and a familiar gate-click, and then the footfalls broke upon the carriage-road, close by us. A man in livery, upon a well-groomed horse—nothing more, but we lived very quietly in a quiet neighbourhood, and it was not an every-day sight with us. Moreover, the man and his livery were strange, and the horse looked tired.

"This event broke up the sitting, and we were strolling up to the house, when a maid met us, saying that my mother wished to see me and Fatima.

"We found my mother sewing, with an opened letter beside her. It was written on one of the large quarto sheets then in use, and it was full of dashes, and covered and crossed, at every available corner, in a vague, scratchy hand.

"'I have heard from an old friend of mine, Mary,' said my mother. 'She has come to live about fifteen miles from here. There is something in the letter about you and Fatima, and you may read that part aloud, if you can. The top of the last page.'

"I found the place, and, with some difficulty, deciphered: 'The dear Major was *all delicacy and consideration*—'

"'No, no!' said my mother, 'the next sentence.'

"'Dear Cecilia was *all sweetness*. The dress was—'

"My mother took the letter, and found the right place herself, and then I read:

"'If you cannot come *yourself*, at least let us renew acquaintance in *our children*. I think you have two girls about thirteen? My Lucy, a *dear child just fifteen*, feels keenly the loss of her only sister, and some young companions would be a *boon*, as all our company will be *aiders*. Pray send

them. They can come by the coach, and shall be met at Durnford, at the Elephant and Castle.'

"'Is the other sister dead?' asked Fatima, pityingly, when we had discussed our personal interest in the subject.

"'Oh, no! only married,' said my mother.

"It was decided that we should go. This decision was not arrived at at once, or without some ups and downs. My mother could not go herself, and had some doubts as to our being old enough, as yet, to go out visiting alone. It will be believed that I made much of being able to say—'But you know, I am thirteen, now.'

"Next day, in the evening, my father was busy in his study, and my mother sat at the open window, with Fatima and me at her feet. The letter of acceptance had been duly sent by the messenger, but she had yet a good deal of advice to give, and some doubts to express. She was one of those people who cannot sit with idle fingers, and as she talked she knitted. We found it easy enough to sit idle upon two little footstools, listening to the dear kind voice, and watching two little clouds, fragments of a larger group, which had detached themselves, and were sailing slowly and alone across the heavens.

"'They are like us two,' Fatima had whispered to me; 'perhaps they are going to see some other clouds.'

"'I have observed two things which are apt to befall young people who go out visiting,' said my mother, as she turned a row in her knitting, 'one is, that they neglect little good habits while they are away, and the other is, that they make themselves very disagreeable when they come back.'

"The clouds drifted on, and my mother continued her knitting, arming us with many wise counsels on small matters connected with this great event; to which

Fatima and I gratefully gave half our minds, whilst with the other half we made rosy pictures of unparalleled excellence under trying circumstances, by which, hereafter, we should prove these warnings and counsels to have been, in our case, unnecessary and superfluous.

“‘Most families and most people,’ said my mother, ‘have little good habits and customs of their own which they feel bound to keep, although they are not among the great general duties which bind every one. So long as young people are at home, these matters are often simple enough, but when they go away certain difficulties arise. They go amongst people whose little habits are not the same as those to which they have been accustomed. Sometimes they come to very uncharitable conclusions upon their friends’ characters in consequence. And, I must say, that I have never met with any one who could be more severe than young people of your age are apt to be. I remember it of myself, and I have seen it in so many other girls. Home is naturally the standard, and whatever is different seems wrong. As life goes on, these young critics learn (or should learn) to distinguish between general and particular duties; and also coming to know a larger number of people, they find that all good persons are not cut to the same pattern, and that one’s friends’ little ways are not therefore absurd, because one does not happen to be used to them. On the other hand, if going amongst other people may tempt you to be critical of their little habits, it is also apt to make you neglect your own. Perhaps you think this cannot much matter, as they are not the great duties, and as other people seem to get on quite well without them. But one learns in the end, that no character of any value is formed without the discipline of individual rules, and that rules are of no use that are not held to against circum-

stances. “Charitable to others, severe to himself,” seems a maxim for grown-up people in grown-up things; but, I believe, my little daughters, that the doubts and difficulties of life begin very early, earlier than they are commonly provided against; I think that innumerable girls struggle miserably in the practice of duty, from a radical ignorance of its principles, and that the earlier these are learnt, the smaller is the burden of regret one heaps together to oppress the future, and the sooner one finds that peace of mind which is not common even amongst the young, and should-be lighthearted.’

“In these, or words to this effect, my dear mother prepared us for our first plunge into society. We discussed the little good habits we were to maintain, and, amongst others, certain little Sunday customs—for we were to be away for a week.

“‘We can’t take all our good habits with us, if you won’t come,’ I said. ‘What is to become of the Sunday readings?’

“For my mother used to read to us every Sunday evening, and we were just in the middle of that book of wondrous fascination—‘The Pilgrim’s Progress.’

“‘If it were not for the others, and if you would trust us with it,’ said Fatima, thoughtfully, ‘we might take the book with us, and Mary might read to me, if she would,—I like her reading.’

“My mother consented. There was another copy in the house, and though this volume was a favourite, she said it was time we learnt to take care of valuable books. So it was settled. We talked no more that evening; and the clouds drifted out of sight.

“‘They have gone to bed in a big dark cloud on the other side,’ said Fatima, yawning; and we went to bed also.

“My story wanders, Ida; this is because it is an old woman’s tale. Old people of my age become prosy, my dear. They love



"My mother sat at the open window, with Fatima and me at her feet." (P. 45.)

to linger over little remembrances of youth, and to recall the good counsels of kind voices long silent. But I must not put you to sleep a second time, so I will not describe the lists of good habits which Fatima and I drew up in fine Roman characters, and which were to be kept as good resolutions had never been kept before. We borrowed the red ink, to make them the more impressive to the eye, and, unfortunately, spilt it. A bad beginning, as many of our rules had reference to tidiness. Neither will I give you the full account of how we packed. How our preparations began at once, and were only stopped by the necessity of setting off when the day arrived. How we emptied all our drawers and cupboards, and disarranged both our bookshelves; and, in making ready for the life of order and tidiness we were to live abroad, passed that week at home with our room in such chaos as it had never been in before. How we prepared against an amount of spare time, that experience eventually teaches one is not to be found out visiting; and, with this object, took more sewing than we should have performed in a month at home; books, that we had not touched for years; drawings, that were fated to be once touched, and no more.

"I will not describe the big box, which my father lent to us, nor the joys of packing. How Fatima's workbox dove-tailed with my desk. How the books (not having been chosen with reference to this great event) were of awkward sizes, and did not make comfortable paving for the bottom of the trunk; whilst folded stockings may be called the packer's delight, from their usefulness to fill up corners. How, having packed the whole week long, we were barely ready, and a good deal flurried at the last moment; and how we took all our available property with us, and left the key

of the trunk behind. Fancy for yourself, how the green coach picked us up at the toll-bar, and how, as it jingled on, we felt the first qualm of home-sickness, and, stretching our heads and hands out of the window, waved adieux and kisses innumerable to Home, regardless of our fellow-traveller in the corner, an old gentleman, with a yellow silk-handkerchief on his head, who proved in the end a very pleasant companion. I remember that we told him our family history, with minutest particulars, and conjugated four regular Latin verbs by his orders; and that he rewarded our confidences and learning with the most clear, the most sweet, the most amber-coloured sticks of barley-sugar I have ever had the good fortune to meet with. I remember also how, in the warmth of our new friendship, Fatima unveiled to him the future, which, through some joke of my father's, we had laid out for ourselves.

"I am to marry a Sultan, for I am moon-faced; but Mary is to be a linguist, for she has large eyes."

"Then Miss Mary is not to marry?" said the old gentleman, with a grim smile.

"I shook my head in sage disdain. 'When I am sixteen, I shall be an Amazon.'"

"Precisely what I meant by this I don't think I knew myself, but my dreams were an odd compound of heroic and fairy lore, with a love and ambition for learning that were simply an inheritance. Many a night did I fancy myself master of all the languages of the world, hunting up and down the windy hills in a dress of Lincoln green. I had a mighty contempt for men, and a high respect for myself, that was the greatest of my many follies.

"After these interesting revelations we had barley-sugar all round, and the coach rattled into Durnford.

"Shall I tell you how we were met at the Elephant and Castle by a footman of

most gentlemanlike appearance (his livery excepted), who, with a sagacity which somewhat puzzled us, discovered that we were 'the young ladies that were expected,' and led us to the carriage, firmly opposing my efforts to fulfil the last home orders I had received, to 'look after the box?' How in the carriage we found a lady handsomely dressed in black, who came out to meet us, and seemed so anxious for our comfort, and so much interested in our arrival, that we naturally supposed her to be the lady who had invited us, till we discovered that she was the lady's maid; and on arriving found our hostess quite another sort of person, with no appearance at all of being particularly interested in our arrival, which I have since found to be the case with the heads of some other country houses.

"It was a large house, reminding me of the Manor within, but prettier outside; old and irregularly built, with mullioned windows, and odd wings and corners. A glowing, well-kept garden contrasted prettily with the greystone, and the grounds seemed magnificent to our eyes.

"We were shown into the drawing-room, where the real lady of the house sat at a dainty writing-table, scratching away at a letter that was no doubt as affectionate as the one which my mother had received. She was shortsighted, which seemed to be the case also with most of the other ladies in the room; this, perhaps, was why they stared so hard at us, and then went on with the elaborate pieces of needlework on which all of them were engaged. It seemed to take our hostess a second or two to see us, and another second or two to recall who we were; then she came forward very kindly, showed us where to sit, and asked after my mother. Whilst I was replying, she crossed to the fireplace, and rang the bell; and I felt slightly surprised by her seeming to wish for no further news of her

old friend. She asked if we had had a pleasant journey, and Fatima had hardly pronounced a modest yes, before she begged we would allow her to finish her letter, and went back to the spindle-legged table. Whilst she scratched we looked around us. Three or four ladies were in the room, more or less young, more or less pretty, more or less elegantly dressed, and all with more or less elaborate pieces of needlework. There was one gentleman, young and dark, with large brown eyes, who seemed to be employed in making paper pellets of an old letter, chatting the while in a low voice to a young lady with a good deal of red hair. We afterwards found out that he was an Irishman, familiarly called 'Pat' by some of the young ladies, who seemed to be related to him. We had seen all this when the manservant appeared at the door.

"Where is Miss Lucy, Thompson?' our hostess asked, sharply.

"I will inquire, ma'am,' Thompson replied, with the utmost softness, and vanished.

"The scratching began again, the Irishman went on gently chatting, and it all felt very like a horrid dream. Then Thompson reappeared.

"Miss Lucy is out, ma'am.'

"Did she know what time these young ladies were to arrive?'

"Miss Lucy knew that the carriage had gone to meet them, ma'am.'

"Very thoughtless! Very thoughtless indeed!' said the lady. Thompson paused respectfully, as if to receive the full weight of the remark, and then vanished noiselessly, as before.

"There was an awkward pause. Our hostess left off scratching, and looked very cross; the Irishman fired one of his pellets across the room, and left off chatting; and the red-haired young lady got up, and rustled across to us. I remember her so well, Ida, for we fell deeply in love with

her and her kindness. I remember her green and white dress. She had a fair round face, more pleasant than really pretty, a white starlike forehead, almost too firm a mouth, but a very gentle voice, at least so we thought, when she said:

"As Lucy is out, may I take these young ladies to their room?"

"Our hostess hesitated, and murmured something about Bedford, who was the lady's maid. The starlike forehead contracted, and the red-haired young lady said, rather emphatically:

"As Lucy is not in to receive her friends, I thought I might perhaps supply her place."

"Well, my dear Kate, if you *will* be so kind," said our hostess. "I *must* finish these letters."

"The yellow room?" said the young lady, abruptly, and swept us off without further parley. The Irish gentleman opened the door for us, staring with a half-puzzled, half-amused look at the lofty air with which the young lady passed out. He followed us into the hall, where we left him discharging his remaining pellets at the furniture, and whistling 'Kathleen Mavourneen,' as clearly as a bird.

"The yellow room was a large airy one, with white painted wainscoting, a huge four-post bed with yellow curtains, and a pretty view from the windows. In the middle of the floor we saw our box standing in all its dignity, unrecorded, and ready. Then it was that the terrible fact broke upon our minds that the key was left behind. My sufferings during the few seconds before I found courage to confide this misfortune to our new friend, were considerable. When I did tell her, the calmness and good nature with which she received the confession were both surprising and delightful.

"The lock doesn't look a very uncommon one," she said, as she opened the

door. 'I dare say I may find a key to fit it.'

"What's the matter?" said a voice outside. It was the Irish gentleman. She explained.

"Keys?" said the Irish gentleman; 'got lots in my pocket, besides their being totally unnecessary, as I'm a capital hand at lock-picking. Let me see.'

"With which he slipped in, seeming quite as much at his ease as in the drawing-room, and in another second had squatted upon the floor before our box, where he seemed to be quite as comfortable as in the arm-chair he had left. Here he poked, and fitted, and whistled, and chatted without a pause.

"I've locks and keys to everything I possess," he cheerfully remarked; 'and as I never lock up anything, there's no damage done if the keys are left behind, which is a good thing, you see, as I always leave everything everywhere.'

"Do you make a principle of it?" asked the young lady, coldly.

"I'm afraid I make a practice of it." He had opened the box, and was leaning against the bed-post, with a roguish twinkle in his brown eyes, which faded, however, under the silent severity of the red-haired young lady, and gave place to a look of melancholy that might have melted granite, as he added:

"I'm all alone, you see, that's what does it. I believe I'm the neatest creature breathing, if I'd only somebody to keep me up to it."

"Neither his hardened untidiness nor his lonely lot seemed, however, to weigh heavily on his mind; for he withdrew whistling, and his notes were heard about the passages for some little time. When they had died away in a distant part of the house, the red-haired young lady left us also.

"I shall not give you a lengthened ac-

count of our unpacking, dear Ida; though it was as enjoyable, but less protracted than the packing-up had been. How we revelled in the spacious drawers and cupboards, over which we were queens, and how strictly we followed one of our mother's wise counsels—'unpack to the bottom of your box at once, however short your visit may be; it saves time in the end.' We did unpack to the lowest book (an artificial system of memory, which I had long been purposing to study, which I thought to find spare moments to practise here, and which, I may as well confess, I did not look at during the visit, and have not learnt to this day). We divided shelves and pegs with all fairness, and as a final triumph found a use for the elaborate watch-pockets that hung above our pillows. They were rich with an unlimited expenditure of quilled ribbon, and must have given a great deal of trouble to someone who had not very many serious occupations in this life. Fatima and I wished that we had watches to put in them, till the happy thought suddenly struck one of us, that we could keep in them our respective papers of good habits.

"Bedford came in whilst we were in the midst of our labours, and warmly begged us to leave everything to her, as she would put our things away for us. The red-haired young lady had sent her, and she became a mainstay of practical comfort to us during our visit. She seemed a haven of humanity after the conventions of the drawing-room. From her we got incidental meals when we were hungry, spirits of wine when Fatima's tooth ached, warnings when we were near to being late for breakfast, little modern and fashionable turns to our hair and clothes, and familiar anecdotes of this household and of others in which she had lived. I remember her with gratitude.

"Miss Lucy came home before our put-

ting away was fairly finished, and we had tea with her in the schoolroom. She was a slight, sharp, lively young lady, looking older than fifteen to us, rather pretty, and very self-possessed. She scanned us from head to foot when we first met, and I felt as if her eyes had found defects innumerable, which seemed the less likely, as she also was shortsighted. As her governess was away visiting a sick relative, Miss Lucy did the honours of the schoolroom. She was cold and inattentive at first, became patronizing at tea, and ended by being gracious. In her gracious mood she was both affectionate and confidential. She called us 'my dear girls,' put her arms round us as we sat in the dark, and chattered without a pause about herself, her governesses, her sister, and her sister's husband.

"'A wedding in the house,' she observed, 'is very good fun, particularly if you take a principal part in it. I was chief bride's-maid you know, my dear girls. But I'll tell you the whole affair from the first. You know I had never been bride's-maid before, and I couldn't make up my mind about how I should like the dresses,' &c., &c. And we had got no further in the story than Miss Lucy's own costume, when we were called to dress and go downstairs.

"'What are you going to put on?' she asked, balancing herself at our door and peering in.

"'White muslin!' we said with some pride, for they were new frocks, and splendid in our eyes.

"'I have had so many muslins, I am tired of them,' she said; 'I shall wear a pink silk to-night. The trimming came from London. Perhaps I may wear a muslin to-morrow; I have an Indian one. But you shall see my dresses to-morrow, my dear girls.'

"With which she left us, and we put on our new frocks (which were to be *the*

evening dresses of our visit) in depressed spirits. This was owing to the thought of the pink silk, and of the possibility of a surfeit of white muslin.

"During the evening we learnt another of Miss Lucy's peculiarities. Affectionate as she had been when we were alone together, she was no sooner among the grown-up young ladies downstairs than she kept with them as much as she was permitted, and seemed to forget us altogether. Perhaps a fit of particularly short sight attacked her; for she seemed to look over us, away from us, on each side of us, anywhere but at us, and to be quite unconscious of our existence. The red-haired young lady had made her fetch us a large scrap-book, and we sat with this before our eyes, and the soft monotonous chit-chat of our hostess in our ears, as she talked and worked with some elder ladies on the sofa. It seemed a long gossip, with no particular end or beginning, in which tatting, trimmings, military distinction, linen, servants, honourable conduct, sentiment, settlements, expectations, and Bath waters were finely blended. From the constant mention of Cecilia and the dear major, it was evident that the late wedding was the subject of discourse; indeed, for that matter, it remained the prime topic of conversation during our stay.

"Cecilia and the dear major were at Bath, and their letters were read aloud at the breakfast-table. I remember wondering at the deep interest that all the ladies seemed to take in the bride's pretty flow of words about the fashions, the drives, and the pump-room, and the long lists of visitors' names; this, too, without any connection between the hearers and the people and places mentioned. When anybody did recognize a name, however, about which she knew anything, it seemed like the finding of a treasure. All the ladies bore down upon it at once, dug up the

family history to its farthest known point, and divided the subject among them. Miss Lucy followed these letters closely, and remembered them wonderfully, though (as I afterwards found) she had never seen Bath, and knew no more of the people mentioned than the little hearsay facts she had gathered from former letters.

"It is a very useful art, my dear Ida, and one in which I have sadly failed all my life, to be able to remember who is related to whom, what watering-place such a family went to the summer before last, and which common friends they met there, &c. But like other arts it demands close attention, forbids day-dreaming, and takes up a good deal of time.

"*'Wasn't it odd,'* said Miss Lucy, one morning after breakfast, *'that Cecilia and the major should meet those Hicksons?'*

"*'Who are the Hicksons?'* I asked.

"*'Oh! my dear girl, don't you remember, in Cecilia's last letter, her telling us about the lady she met in that shop when they were in town, buying a shawl the counterpart of her own? and it seems so odd they should turn up in Bath, and be such nice people! Don't you remember mamma said it must be the same family as that Colonel Hickson who was engaged to a girl with one eye, and she caught the small-pox and got so much marked, and he broke it off?'*

"*'Small-pox and one eye would look very ugly,'* Fatima languidly observed; and this subject drifted after the rest.

"One afternoon, I remember, it chanced that we were left alone with our hostess in the drawing-room. No one else happened to be in the way to talk to, and the good lady talked to us. We were clever girls for our age, I fancy, and we had been used to talk a good deal with our mother; at any rate we were attentive listeners, and I do not think our hostess required much more of us. I think she was glad of any-

body who had not heard the whole affair from beginning to end, and so she put up her feet on the sofa, and started afresh with the complete history of her dear Cecilia from the cradle; and had gone on to the major, his military exploits abroad, his genteel connections at home, and the tendency to gout in the family which troubled him at times, and was a sad anxiety to her dear child, when visitors were announced.

"Our intelligent attention had gained favour for us; and we were introduced to these ladies as 'daughters of a very dear friend of mine, whom I have not seen for years,' on which one lady gave a sweet glance and a tight smile and murmured:

"*"So pleasant to renew acquaintance in the children;"* and the other ladies gave sweet glances, and tight smiles also, and echoed:

"*"So pleasant!"*

"*"Such sensible girls!"* said our hostess, as if we were not there; *"like women of fifty. So like their dear mother! Such treasures to my little Lucy! You know she has lost her dear sister,"* &c., &c.

"For then the ladies drew together, and our hostess having got a fresh audience, we retired to distant armchairs, a good deal bewildered.

"But to return to our first evening.

"Miss Lucy and we retired together, and no sooner had the drawing-room door closed behind us, than she wound her arms round our waists, and became as devoted as if we had been side by side the whole evening.

"*"I'll tell you what I'll do, my dear girls,"* she said when we reached our room; *"I'll come and sleep with you (there's lots of room for three), and then I can go on about Cecilia's affair, and if we don't finish to-night we can go on to-morrow morning before we get up. I always wake early,*

so I can call you. I'll come back when I'm ready for bed.

"And she vanished.

"We were in bed when she returned. Her hair had been undergoing some wonderful process, and was now stowed away under a large and elaborate night-cap.

"*"Bedford was so slow,"* said she; *"and then, you know, I got into bed, and let her tidy the room, and then when she was fairly gone, out I got, and here I am. We shall be as comfortable as possible; I'll be in the middle, and then I can have you on each side of me, my dear girls;"* and in she sprang.

"*"Did you notice this?"* she asked, holding up her hand, and pointing out the edging on the sleeve of her night-dress; *"it's a new pattern; do you know it? Oh! my dears, the yards and yards of tatting that Cecilia had for her trousseau!"*

"Tatting was a fashionable kind of work in those days, Ida. Ladies had pretty little shuttles for it of ivory or silver, and used them very dexterously; but Fatima and I were not rich in tatting edgings, and rejoiced when the conversation took another turn.

"*"About the proposal,"* she rambled on; *"do you know I don't really know whereabouts Henry—that is the major, my brother-in-law"—*she added, with one of the little attacks of dignity to which she was subject, *"proposed or what he said. I asked Cecy, but she wouldn't tell me. She was very cross, often; I'm very glad she's married. I think sisters ought to marry off as fast as they can; they never get on well in a house together, you know."*

"I fairly gasped at this idea, and Fatima said bluntly:

"*"There are lots of us, and we get on."*

"*"Ah!"* said Miss Lucy, in tones of wisdom; *"wait till you're a little older, and you'll see. Cecy was at school with two sisters who hated each other like*

poison, and they were obliged to dress alike, and the younger wore out her things much faster than the other one, but she was obliged to wear them till her sister's were done. She used to wish so her sister would marry, Cecy said, but they are neither of them married yet. I shouldn't wonder if they're both old maids, and go on quarrelling to the end of their days. Cecy and I weren't like that; but still I'm very glad she is married. Now wasn't it stupid of her not to tell me? I should never have told anybody, you know. And don't you wonder what gentlemen *do* say, and how they say it? He couldn't propose sitting, and I think standing would be very awkward. I suppose he knelt. Aunt Maria doesn't approve of gentlemen kneeling; she says it's idolatry. I think they must look very silly. Cecy wouldn't even tell me what he said. She said he spoke to mamma, and mamma said his conduct was highly honourable; but I think it was very stupid. Do you know, my dears, I have a cousin who was really married at Gretna Green? She married an officer. He was splendidly handsome; but people said things against him, and her parents objected. So they eloped, and then went to Wales, to such a lovely place! Wasn't it romantic? They quarrelled afterwards though; he lives abroad now. People ought to be careful. I shall be very careful myself; I mean to refuse the first few offers I get.

"And so Miss Lucy rambled on, talking nonsense, and rather spiteful indelicate nonsense on serious and tender subjects, which she was not old enough to quite understand, or wise enough to duly appreciate. We were too young to see it fully; but her frivolity and a certain vulgarity of mind, jarred upon us, though she amused us, and excited our curiosity. She was not worse than many other young people, with plenty of inquisitiveness and sharp

sense, and not too much refinement and feeling; whose accomplishments are learnt from the 'first masters,' and whose principles are left to be picked up from gossip, servants, and second-rate books; digested by ignorant, and undisciplined minds.

"I won't try to recall any more of it, dear Ida. I remember it was a continuous stream of unedifying gossip, varied by small boastings about her own family. 'We've so many connections,' was a favourite phrase of Miss Lucy's, and it seemed to mean a great deal. 'Do you like making trees?' she asked. I was getting sleepy, and without much thought replied, 'Oh yes, I am very fond of trees, and I like growing oak trees in bottles.' Miss Lucy's, 'My dear girl, I mean family trees, genealogical trees,' was patronizing to scorn. 'Ours is in the spring drawer of the big oak cabinet in the drawing-room,' she added. 'We are descended from King Stephen.'

"I believe I was the first to fall asleep that night. The last words I remember hearing were 'We've so many connections.'

"The next day's post brought news from Bath of more general interest to the household. The plans of Cecilia and the major were changed; they were coming to her mother's on the following Monday.

"'My dear girls, I *am* so glad!' said Miss Lucy; 'you'll see them. But you will have to move out of your room, I am sorry to say.'

"And for the next twelve hours Miss Lucy was more descriptive of her family glories in general, and of the glories of her sister and brother-in-law in particular, than ever.

"Sunday was a day of mixed experiences to us; some pleasant and some the reverse. Miss Lucy in her best clothes was almost intolerably patronizing, and a general stiffness seemed to pervade everything, the ladies' silk dresses included.

After breakfast we dawdled about till it was time to dress for church, and as most of the ladies took about five minutes more than they had allowed for, it seemed likely that we should be late. At the last moment, Miss Lucy lost her Prayer Book, and it was not till another five minutes had gone in the search that she remembered having left it in church the Sunday before. This being settled we all stowed away in the carriages and drove off. It was only a short drive; but when we came in sight of the quaint little church there was no sound of bells, and it became evident that we were late. In the porch we shook out our dresses, the Irishman divided the burden of Prayer Books he had been gallantly bearing, our hostess turned back from the half-open door to say in a loud and encouraging whisper, 'It's only the Confession;' and we swept up the little church into a huge square pew.

"My dear Ida, I must tell you that we had been brought up to have a just horror of being late for service, this being a point on which my father was what is called 'very particular.' Fatima and I therefore felt greatly discomposed by our late and disturbing entrance, though we were in no way to blame. We had also been taught to kneel during the prayers, and it was with a most uncomfortable sensation of doubt and shame-facedness that we saw one lady after another sit down and bend her bonnet over her lap, and hesitated ourselves to follow our own customs in the face of such a majority. But the red-haired young lady seemed fated to help us out of our difficulties. She sank at once on her knees in a corner of the pew, her green silk falling round round her; we knelt by her side, and the question was settled. The little Irishman cast a doubtful glance at her for a moment, and then sat down, bending his head

deeply into his hat. We went through a similar process about responding, which did not seem to be the fashion with our hostess and her friends. The red-haired young lady held to her own customs, however, and we held with her. Our responses were the less conspicuous as they were a good deal drowned by the voice of an old gentleman in the next pew. Diversity seemed to prevail in the manners of the congregation. This gentleman stood during prayers, balancing a huge Prayer Book on the corner of the pew, and responding in a loud voice, more devout than tuneful, keeping exact time with the parson also, as if he had a grudge against the clerk and felt it due to himself to keep in advance of him. I remember, Ida, that as we came in, he was just saying, 'those things which we ought *not* to have done,' and he said it in so terrible a voice, and took such a glance at us over his gold-rimmed spectacles, that I wished the massive pulpit-hangings would fall and bury my confusion. When the text of the sermon had been given out, our hostess rustled up, and drew the curtains well round our pew. Opposite to me, however, there was a gap through which I could see the old gentleman. He had settled himself facing the pulpit, and sat there gazing at the preacher with a rigid attention which seemed to say—'Sound doctrine, if you please.'

"We returned as we came.

"'Is there afternoon service?' I asked Miss Lucy.

"'Oh, yes!' was the reply, 'the servants go in the afternoon.'

"'Don't you?' I asked.

"'Oh, no!' said Miss Lucy, 'once is enough. You can go with the maids, if you want to, my dears,' she added, with one of the occasional touches of insolence in which she indulged.

"Afternoon arrived, and I held con-

sultation with Fatima as to what we were to do.

"When once roused, Fatima was more resolute than I.

"Of course we'll go," said she; "what's the use of having written out all our good rules and sticking at this? We always go twice at home. Let's look for Bedford."

"On which mission I set forth, but when I reached the top of the stairs I caught sight of the red-haired young lady, in her bonnet and shawl, standing at the open door, a Prayer Book in her hand. I dashed downstairs, and entered the hall just as the Irishman came into it by another door. In his hand was a Prayer Book also, and he picked up his hat, and went smiling towards her. But as he approached the young lady, she looked so much annoyed—not to say cross—that I hesitated to go forwards.

"Are you going to church?" said the little Irishman, with a pleased look.

"I don't know," said the young lady, briefly, "are you?"

"I was——" he began, and stopped short, looking puzzled and vexed.

"Is no one else going?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"No one else ever does go," she said, impatiently, and moved into the hall.

The Irishman coloured.

"I am in the habit of going twice myself, though you may not think it," he said quietly; "my poor mother always did. But I do not pretend to go to such good purpose as she did, or as you would, so if it is to lie between us——" and, without finishing his sentence, he threw his book (not too gently) on to the table, and, just lifting his hat as he passed her, dashed out into the garden.

"I did not at all understand this little scene, but, as soon as he was gone, I ran up to ask our friend if she were going to

church, and would take us. She consented, and I went back in triumph to Fatima. As there was no time to lose, we dressed quickly enough; so that I was rather surprised, when we went down, to find the Irish gentleman, with his face restored to its usual good humour, standing by our friend, and holding her Prayer Book as well as his own. The young lady did not speak, but, cheerfully remarking that we had plenty of time before us, he took our books also, and we all set forth.

"I remember that walk so well, Ida! The hot, sweet summer afternoon—the dusty plants by the pathway—the clematis in the hedges (I put a bit into my Prayer Book, which was there for years)—the grasshoppers and flies that our dresses caught up from the long grass, and which reappeared as we sat during the sermon.

"The old gentleman was in his pew, but his glance was almost benevolent, as, in good time, we took our places. We (literally) *followed* his example with much heartiness in the responses; and, if he looked over into our pew during prayers (and from his position he could hardly avoid it), he must have seen that even the Irishman had rejected compromises, and that we all knelt together.

"There was one other feature of that service not to be forgotten. When the sermon was ended, and I had lost sight of the last grasshopper in my hasty rising, we found that there was to be a hymn. It was the old custom of this church so to conclude Evening Prayer. No one seemed to use a book—it was Bishop Ken's evening hymn, which every one knew, and, I think, every one sang. But the feature of it to us was when the Irishman began to sing. From her startled glance, I think not even the red-haired young lady had known that he possessed so beautiful a voice. It had a clearness without effort, a tone, a truth, a pathos, such as I have



"No one seemed to use a book—it was Bishop Ken's evening hymn, which every one knew, and, I think, every one sang. But the feature of it to us was when the Irishman began to sing." (P. 56.)

not often heard. It sounded strangely above the nasal tones of the school-children, and the scraping of a solitary fiddle. Even our neighbour, who had lustily followed the rhythm of the tune, though without much varying from the note on which he responded, softened his own sounds and turned to look at the Irishman, who sang on without noticing it, till, in the last verse, he seemed disturbed to discover how many eyes were on him. Happily, self-consciousness had come too late. The hymn was ended.

"We knelt again for the Benediction, and then went back through the summer fields.

"The red-haired young lady talked very little. Once she said:

"How is it we have never heard you sing?"

"To which the Irishman replied:

"I don't understand music, I sing by ear; and I hate 'company' performances. I will sing to you whenever you like."

"Mary," said Fatima, when we were in our room again, "I believe those two will marry each other some day."

"So do I," I answered; "but don't say anything about it to Lucy."

"No, indeed!" said Fatima, warmly. So we kept this idea sacred from Miss Lucy's comments—why, I do not think either of us could have told in words.

"Pity, that pleasant impressions—pity, that most impressions—pass away so soon!

"The evening was not altogether so satisfactory as the afternoon had been. First, Miss Lucy took us to see her sister's wedding-presents, most of which were still in her mother's keeping. They were splen-

did, and Miss Lucy was eloquent. From them we dawdled on into her room, where she displayed her own treasures, with a running commentary on matters of taste and fashion, which lasted till it was time to dress for the evening, when she made the usual inquiry, 'What shall you put on to-night, my dear girls?' and we blushed to own that there was nothing further of our limited toilettes to reveal.

"In the drawing-room, similar subjects of conversation awaited us. Our hostess and her friends did not seem to care much for reading, and, as they did not work on Sunday evening, they talked the more. The chatter ran chiefly upon the Bath fashions, and upon some ball which had been held somewhere, where somebody had been dressed after a manner that it appeared needful to protest against; whilst somebody else (a cousin of our hostess) was at all points so perfectly attired, that it seemed as if she should have afforded ample consolation for the other lady's defects.

"Upon the beauty of this cousin, her father's wealth, and her superabundant opportunities of matrimony, Miss Lucy enlarged to us, as we sat in a corner. Another of her peculiarities, by-the-by, was this. By her own account, all her relatives and friends were in some sense beautiful. The men were generally 'splendidly handsome;' the ladies, 'the loveliest creatures.' If not 'lovely,' they were 'distinguished;' if nothing else, they were 'charming.' For those who were beyond the magic circle, this process was reversed. If pretty, they 'wanted style.' If the dress was beyond criticism, the nose, the complexion, the hand was at fault. I have met with this *trait* in other cliques, since then.

"My dear Ida, I wish to encourage no young lady of the hoydenish age of thirteen, in despising nice dressing and pretty

looks and manners; or in neglecting to pick up any little hints which she may glean in such things from older friends. But there are people to whom these questions seem of such first importance, that to be with them when you are young and impressionable, is to feel every defect in your own personal appearance to be a crime, and to believe that there is neither worth, nor love, nor happiness (no life, in fact, worth living for,) connected with much less than ten thousand a year, and 'connections.' Through some such ordeal we passed that Sunday evening, in seeing and hearing of all the expensive luxuries without which it seemed impossible to feed, dress, sleep, go out—in fact, exist; and all the equally expensive items of adornment, without which it appeared to be impossible to have (or at any rate retain) the respect and affection of your friends.

"Meanwhile the evening slipped by, and our Sunday reading had not been accomplished. We had found little good habits less easy to maintain in a strange household than we had thought, and this one seemed likely to follow some others that had been allowed to slip. The red-haired young lady had been absent for about half an hour, and the Irishman had been prowling restlessly round the room, performing murderous-looking fidgets with the paper-knives, when she returned with a book in her hand, which she settled herself resolutely to read. The Irishman gave a comical glance at the serious-looking volume, and then seating himself on a chair just behind her, found apparent peace in the effort to sharpen a flat ruler on his knees. The young lady read on. It was evident that her Sunday customs were not apt to be disturbed by circumstances.

"I began to feel uncomfortable. Fatima was crouched down near Lucy, listening to the history of a piece of lace. I waited

some little time to catch her eye, and then beckoned her to me.

"'We haven't read,' I whispered.

"'Dare you go?' asked Fatima.

"'We ought,' I said.

"It required more daring than may appear. To such little people as ourselves it *was* rather an undertaking to cross the big drawing-room, stealing together over the soft carpet; to attack the large, smooth handle, open the heavy door, and leave the room in the face of the company. We did it, however, our confusion being much increased by the Irish gentleman, who jumped up to open the door for us. We were utterly unable to thank him, and stumbling over each other in the passage, flew up to our own room like caged birds set free.

"Fatima drew out the pillows from the bed, and made herself easy on the floor. I found the book, and climbed into the window-seat. The sun was setting, the light would not last much longer; yet I turned over the pages slowly, to find the place, which was in the second part, thinking of the conversation downstairs. Fatima heaved a deep sigh among her cushions, and said: 'I wish we were rich.'

"'I wish we were at home,' I answered.

"'When one's at home,' Fatima continued, in doleful tones, 'one doesn't feel it, because one sees nobody but people one knows; but when one goes among strangers, it *is* wretched not to have plenty of money and things. And it's no good saying it isn't,' she added hurriedly, as if to close the subject.

"'It's getting dark,' I said.

"'I beg your pardon: go on,' sighed Fatima.

"I lifted up my voice, and read till I could see no longer. It was about the Valley of Humiliation, through which Mr. Greatheart led Christiana and her children. The 'green valley, beautified with lilies,' in whose meadows the air was pleasant;

where 'a man shall be free from the noise and from the hurryings of this life;' and where 'in former times men have met with angels.'

"The last streaks of crimson were fading in the sky when I read the concluding lines of the shepherd-boy's song—

'Fulness to such a burden is,
That go on pilgrimage,
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.'

"'Here little, and hereafter bliss!'

"It is not always easy to realize what one believes. One needs sometimes to get away from the world around, 'from the noise and from the hurryings of this life,' and to hear, read, see, or do something to remind one that there is a standard which is not of drawing-rooms; that petty troubles are the pilgrimage of the soul; that great and happy lives have been lived here by those who have had but little; and that satisfying bliss is not here, but hereafter.

"We went downstairs slowly, hand in hand.

"'I wonder what Mother is doing,' said Fatima.

"The next day Miss Lucy very good-naturedly helped us to move our belongings into the smaller room we were now to occupy. It was in another part of the house, and we rather enjoyed the running to and fro, especially as Miss Lucy was gracious and communicative in the extreme.

"'This is the oldest part of the house,' she said, as we sat on the bed resting from our labours, for the day was sultry; 'and it breaks off here in an odd way. There are no rooms beyond this. There were some that matched the other side of the house, but they were pulled down.'

"'Why?' we asked.

"'Well, there's a story about it, in the family,' said Miss Lucy, mysteriously. 'But

it's a ghost story. I'll tell you, if you like. But some people are afraid of ghost stories. I'm not; but if you are, I won't tell it.'

"Of course we declared we were not afraid. Sitting there together, on a sunny summer's afternoon, perhaps we were not.

"'It's years and years ago,' began Miss Lucy; 'you know the place has belonged to another branch of our family for generations. Well, at last it came down to an old Mr. Bartlett, who had one daughter, who, of course, was to be the heiress. Well, she fell in love with a man whose name I forget, but he was of inferior family, and very queer character; and her father would not hear of it, and swore that if she married him he would disinherit her. She would have married the man in spite of this, though; but what he wanted was her money; so, when he found that the old man was quite resolute, and that there was no chance of his dying soon, he murdered him.'

"We both exclaimed; for this sudden catastrophe fairly took away our breath. Miss Lucy's nerves were not sensitive, however, and she rattled on.

"'He smothered him in bed, and, as he was a very old man, and might easily have died in the night some other way, and as nothing could be proved, he got off. Well, he married the daughter, and got the property; but the very first evening after he took possession, as he was passing the door of the old man's room, he heard somebody breathing heavily inside, and when he looked in, there was the old father asleep in his bed.'

"'Not really?' we said.

"'Of course not really,' said Miss Lucy, 'but so it was said. That's the ghost part of it. Well, do what he would, he never could get rid of the old man, who was always there asleep; so he pulled the rooms down, and at last he went abroad, and there both he and his wife died, and

the property went to a cousin, who took the name of Bartlett.'

"How awful!' we murmured. But Miss Lucy laughed, and told us other family anecdotes, and the ghost story somewhat passed from our minds, especially as a little later we heard wheels, and, peeping from the landing window, beheld a post-chaise drive up.

"It's Cecilia!' screamed Miss Lucy, and left us at once.

"I may as well say here, my dear Ida, that Cecilia and the major proved altogether different from our expectations. Cecilia, in travelling gear, taking off an old bonnet, begging for a cup of tea, and complaining in soft accents that butter was a halfpenny a pound dearer in Bath than at home, seemed to have no connection with that Cecilia into the trimmings of whose dresses bank-notes had recklessly dissolved. The major, an almost middle-aged man, of roughish exterior, in plain clothes, pulling his moustache over a letter that had arrived for him, dispelled our visions of manly beauty and military pomp even more effectually. Later on, we discovered that Cecilia was really pretty, soft, and gentle, a good deal lectured by her mother, and herself more critical of Miss Lucy's dress and appearance than that young lady had been of ours. The major proved kind and sensible. He was well-to-do, and had 'expectations,' which facts shed round him a glory invisible to us. They seemed a happy couple; more like the rest of the world than we had been led to suppose.

"The new-comers pretty well absorbed our attention during the evening, and it was not till we were fairly entering the older part of the house on our way to bed, that the story of the old man's ghost recurred to my mind. It was a relief to meet Bedford at this point, to hear her cheerful good-night, and to see her turn into a room

only two doors from ours. Once while we were undressing I said:

"What a horrid story that was, that Lucy told us!'

"To which sensible Fatima made answer: 'Don't talk about it.'

"We dismissed the subject by consent, got into bed, and I fell asleep. I do not quite know how far on it was into the night when I was roused by Fatima's voice repeating my name over and over again, in tones of subdued terror. I know nothing more irritatingly alarming, when one is young and nervous, than to be roused thus, by a voice in which the terror is evident and the cause unknown.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Don't you hear?' gasped Fatima, in a whisper.

If she had said at once that there was a robber under the bed, a burglar at the window, or a ghost in the wardrobe, I should have prepared for the worst, and it would have been less alarming than this unknown evil.

"I hear nothing,' I said, pettishly. 'I wish you'd go to sleep, Fatima.'

"There!—now!' said Fatima.

"I held my breath, and in the silence heard distinctly the sound of some one snoring in an adjoining apartment.

"It's only some one snoring,' I said.

"Where?' asked Fatima, with all the tragedy in her voice unabated.

"In the room behind us, of course,' I said, impatiently. 'Can't you hear?'

"Fatima's voice might have been the voice of a shadow as she answered: '*There is no room there.*'

"And then a cold chill crept over me also; for I remembered that the wall from behind which the snoring unmistakeably proceeded was an outer wall. There had been the room of old Mr. Bartlett, which his son-in-law and murderer had pulled down. There he had been heard 'breath-

ing heavily,' and had been seen asleep upon his bed, long after he was smothered in his own pillows, and his body shut up in the family vault. At least, so it was said, and at that particular moment we felt no comfort from the fact that Miss Lucy had said that 'of course it wasn't true.' I said something, to which Fatima made no reply, and I could feel her trembling, and hear a half-choked sob. I think fear for her overpowered my other alarm, and gave me a sort of strength.

"'Don't, dear,' I begged. 'Let's be brave. It must be something else. And there's nothing in the room. Let's go to Bedford. She's next door but one.'

"Fatima could speak no more. By the moonlight through the blind, I jumped up, and half dragged, half helped her out of bed and across the room. Opening the door was the worst. To touch anything at such a moment is a trial. We groped down the passage; I felt the handle of the first door, and turned that of the second, and in we went. The window-blind of this room was drawn up, and the moonlight streamed over everything. A nest of white drapery covered one chair, a muslin dress lay like a sick ghost over a second, some little black satin shoes and web-like stockings were on the floor, a gold watch and one or two feminine ornaments lay on the table; and in the bed reposed—not Bedford, but our friend Kate, fast asleep, with one arm over the bed-clothes, and her long red hair in a pigtail streaming over the pillow. I climbed up and treated her as Fatima had treated me, calling her in low, frightened tones over and over again. She woke at last, and sat up.

"'You sprites! What *is* the matter?' she exclaimed.

"I stumbled through an account of our misfortunes, in the middle of which the young lady lay down, and before it was ended I believe she was asleep again.

Poor Fatima, who saw nothing before us but to return to our room with all its terrors, here began to sob violently, which roused our friend once more, and she became full of pity.

"'You poor children!' she said, 'I'm so sleepy. I cannot get up and go after the ghost now; besides, one might meet somebody. But you may get into bed if you like; there's plenty of room, and nothing to frighten you.'

"In we both crept, most willingly. She gave us the long tail of her hair, and said, 'If you want me, pull. But go to sleep, if you can!'—and, before she had well finished the sentence, her eyes closed once more. In such good company a snoring ghost seemed a thing hardly to be realized. We held the long plait between us, and, clinging to it as drowning men to a rope, we soon slept also.

"When we returned to our room next day, there was no snoring to be heard, and in the full sunshine of a summer morning our fright seemed so completely a thing of the past, that I persuaded myself to suggest that it might have been 'fancy' (Kate had already expressed her deliberate opinion to this effect), to which Fatima, whose convictions were of a more resolute type than mine, replied, 'What's the use of trying to believe what's not true? I heard it; and shall know that I heard it, if I live till I'm a hundred.'

"In all correct ghost stories, when the hero comes down to breakfast in the morning, valiant, but exhausted from the terrors of the night, his host invariably asks him how he slept. When we came down, we found Kate and the Irishman alone together in the breakfast-room. Now it certainly was in keeping with our adventure when he stepped forward, and, bowing profoundly, asked how we had passed the night; but, in spite of the gravity of his face, there was a twinkle in



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the big brown eyes which showed us that we were being made fun of; and I felt slightly indignant with our friend, who had faithfully promised not to betray us to Miss Lucy, and might, I thought, have saved us from the ridicule of the Irishman. The rest of the company began to assemble, however, and to our relief the subject was dropped. But though the Irishman kept our secret, we had every reason to suspect that he did not forget it; he looked terribly roguish through breakfast, and was only kept in order by Kate's severe glances.

"Always breathe through the nose," he suddenly began. "It moderates the severity of the air, is less trying to the lungs, and prevents snoring."

"Very true," said the major, who was sensible, and liked instructive observations.

"It may be laid down as an axiom," continued the Irishman, gravely, "that the man who snores is sure to disturb somebody; and also that the man who doesn't snore till he dies, is not likely to live to be a snoring ghost when he is dead."

"Kate looked daggers. The major laughed, and said, 'Let me give you some beef.' When he didn't understand a remark he always laughed, and generally turned the conversation to eatables, in which he was pretty safe; for food is common ground, and a slight laugh answers most remarks, unless at a serious meeting or a visit of condolence. A little later the Irishman asked: 'What's the origin of the expression, to stir up with a long pole?' which turned the conversation to wild beasts. But he presently inquired: 'What's the meaning of putting a thing up the spout?'

"Pawning it," said the major, promptly.

"People pawn their family jewels sometimes," said Pat. "Did you ever hear of anybody pawning the family ghosts?" he asked, suddenly turning to me. I gave a

distressed 'No,' and he continued, in a whisper, 'You never saw a ghost up the spout?'

"But, before I could answer, he caught Kate's eye, and, making a penitent face, became silent.

"We were in the drawing-room after breakfast, when the Irishman passed the window outside, whistling 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' We were sitting at Kate's feet, and she got up, and whispering, 'He's got something to show you, but he wouldn't let me tell,' went out into the garden, we following her.

"There we found the Irishman, with a long pole, which he was waving triumphantly in the air. He bowed as we approached.

"This, young ladies," he said, "is the original long pole spoken of at the breakfast-table. With this I am about to stir up and bring forth for your inspection the living and identical ghost whose snoring disturbed your repose last night."

"The little Irishman's jokes reassured me. I guessed that he had found some clue to our mysterious noise; but with Fatima it was otherwise. She had been too deeply frightened to recover so easily. She clung trembling to me, as I was following him, and whispered 'I'd rather not.'

"On her behalf I summoned courage to reinonstrate.

"If you please, sir," I said, "Fatima would rather not; and, if you please, don't tease us any more."

"The young lady added her entreaties, but they were not needed. The good-natured little gentleman no sooner saw Fatima's real distress than he lowered his pole, and sank upon his knees on the grass, with a face of genuine penitence.

"I am so sorry I've been tormenting you so!" he exclaimed. "I forgot you were really frightened, and you see I knew it wasn't a ghost."

"‘I heard it,’ murmured Fatima, resolutely, with her eyes half shut.

"‘So did I,’ said the Irishman, gaily; ‘I’ve heard it dozens of times. It’s the owls.’

"We both exclaimed.

"‘Ah!’ he said, comically, ‘I see you don’t believe me! That’s what comes of telling so many small fibs. But it’s true, I assure you. (And the brown eyes did look particularly truthful.) Barn-door owls do make a noise that is very like the snoring of an old man. And there are some young ones who live in the spout at the corner of the wall of your room. They’re snoring and scrambling in and out of that spout all night.’

"It was quite true, Ida, as we found, when Fatima was at last persuaded to visit the corner where the rooms had been pulled down, and where, decorated with ivy, the old spout formed a home for the

snoring owls. By the aid of the long pole he brought out a young one to our view,—a shy, soft, lovely, shadow-tinted creature, ghostly enough to behold, who felt like an impalpable mass of fluff, utterly refused to be kissed, and went savagely blinking back into his spout at the earliest possible opportunity. His snoring alarmed us no more."

"And the noise really was that?" said Ida.

"It really was, my dear."

"It's a splendid story," said Ida; "you see, I didn't go to sleep *this* time. And what became of everybody, please? Did the red-haired young lady marry the Irishman?"

"Very soon afterwards, my dear," said Mrs. Overthway. "We kept up our friendship, too, in after life; and I have many times amused their children with the story of the Snoring Ghost."

REKA DOM.

REKA DOM.

AT last Ida was allowed to go out. She was well wrapped up, and escorted by Nurse in a short walk for the good of her health. It was not very amusing, but the air was fresh and the change pleasant, although the street did not prove quite that happy region it had looked from the nursery windows. Moreover, however strong one may fancy one has become indoors, the convalescent's first efforts out of doors are apt to be as feeble as those of a white moth that has just crept from the shelter of its cocoon, giddy with daylight, and trembling in the open air. By-and-by this feeling passed away, and one afternoon Ida was allowed to go by herself into the garden, "just for a run."

The expression was metaphorical, for she was far from being able to run; but she crept quietly up and down the walks, and gathered some polyanthuses, putting them to her face with that pleasure which the touch of fresh flowers gives to an invalid. Then she saw that the hedge was budding, and that the gap through which she had scrambled was filled up. Ida thought of the expedition and smiled. It had certainly made her very ill, but—it had led to Mrs. Overthway.

The little old lady did not come that day, and in the evening Ida was sent for by her uncle. She had not been downstairs in the evenings since her illness. These interviews with the reserved old gentleman were always formal, uncomfort-

able affairs, from which Ida escaped with a sense of relief, and that evening—being weak with illness and disappointed by Mrs. Overthway's absence—her nervousness almost amounted to terror.

Nurse did her best in the way of encouragement. It was true that Ida's uncle was not a merry gentleman, but there was such a nice dessert! What could a well-behaved young lady desire more than to wear her best frock, and eat almonds and raisins in the dining-room, as if she were the lady of the house?

"Though I am sorry for the child," Nurse confided to the butler when she had left Ida with her uncle, "for his looks are enough to frighten a grown person, let alone a little girl. And do you go in presently, like a good soul, if you can find an excuse, and let her see a cheerful face."

But before the kind-hearted old manservant could find a plausible pretext for intruding into the dining-room, and giving an encouraging smile from behind his master's chair, Ida was in the nursery once more.

She had honestly endeavoured to be good. She had made her curtsy at the door without a falter—weak as she was. She had taken her place at the head of the table with all dignity, and had accepted the almonds and raisins with sufficiently audible thanks. She had replied prettily enough to her uncle's inquiries after her health; and, anxious to keep up the con-

versation, had told him that the hedge was budding.

"*What's* the matter with the hedge?" he had asked rather sharply; and when Ida repeated her bit of spring news, he had not seemed to be interested. It was no part of the gardener's work.

Ida relapsed into silence, and so did her uncle. But this was not all. He had sharp eyes, and fierce bushy eyebrows, from under which he was apt to scrutinize Ida in a way that seemed to scatter all her presence of mind. This night of all nights she found his eyes upon her oftener than usual. Whenever she looked up he was watching her, and her discomfort increased accordingly. At last he broke the silence abruptly by saying:

"You were very sorry, child, were you not, when the news came of your father's death?"

The sudden introduction of this sacred subject made Ida's head reel.

"What?" she cried, and could get no further.

"Have you forgotten already?" the old gentleman said, almost reprovingly. "You did not know him, it is true; but you must remember hearing that your poor father had been drowned at sea?"

Ida's only reply was such a passionate outburst of weeping that her uncle rang the bell in helpless dismay, and was thankful when the old butler lifted the child tenderly in his arms and carried her back to Nurse. The old gentleman's feelings were more kindly than his looks, and he was really as much concerned as puzzled by the effect of his remarks. When the butler returned with the report that Ida was going quietly to bed, he sent her his "love" (the word seemed to struggle with some difficulty from behind his neckcloth), and all the remaining almonds and raisins.

"I can't eat them," said Ida, smiling feebly, for her head was aching, "but it is

very kind of him; and please tell Brown to tell him that I am very sorry, and please put the almonds and raisins into my box. I will make a doll's feast with them, if ever I make dolls' feasts again."

With which the weary little maid turned upon her pillow, and at last forgot her troubles in sleep.

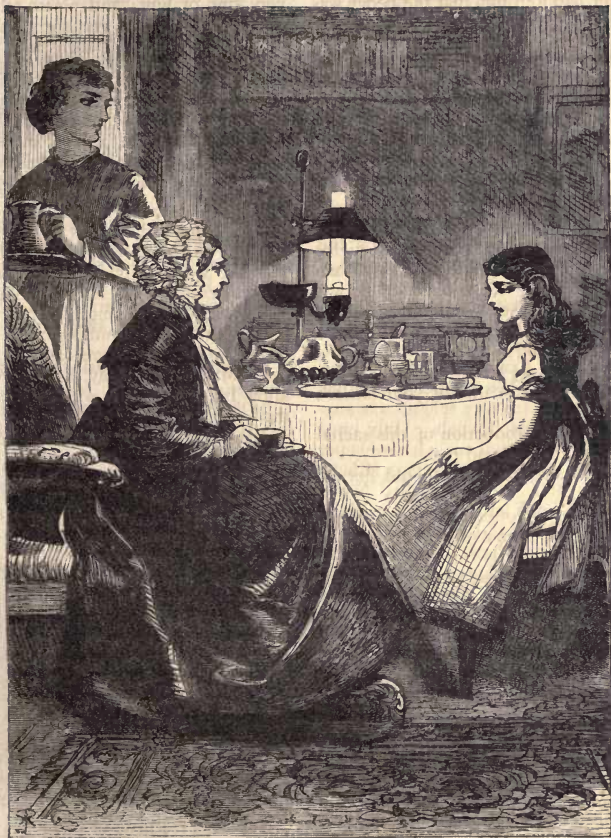
The next morning Brown delivered a similar message from the old gentleman. He had gone away by an early train on business, but had left Ida his love.

"It's very kind of him," said Ida, again. But she went sadly on with some paper she was cutting into shapes. She was in low spirits this morning.

Comfort was at hand, however. In the course of the day there came a message from Mrs. Overthway, asking Nurse to allow Ida to go to tea with her that evening. And Nurse consented.

Ida could hardly believe her senses when she found herself by the little old lady's own fireside. How dainty her room was! How full the bookshelves were! How many pictures hung upon the walls!

Above a little table, on which were innumerable pretty things, hung two pictures. One of these was a portrait of a man who, from his apparent age, might have been the old lady's son, but that he was not at all like her. He might have been good-looking, though, Ida thought, and he had a kind, intelligent face, full of energy and understanding, and that is better still. Close under his portrait hung a little sketch. It was of a road running by a river. Opposite to the river was a house and some trees. It was a pretty sketch, Ida thought, and the road looked interesting, as some roads do in pictures—making one wish to get into the frame and walk down them to see whither they lead. Below the sketch were some curious-looking characters written in ink, and of these Ida could make nothing.



"The white cloth seemed to Ida the whitest she had ever seen, the silver and glass glittered, the china was covered with a rosebud pattern, and a reading-lamp threw a clear soft light over all. . . . Even the waiting-maid was pretty, and had something of the old lady's smile." (P. 72.)

Tea was soon ready. It was spread out on a little table by itself. The white cloth seemed to Ida the whitest she had ever seen, the silver and glass glittered, the china was covered with a rosebud pattern, and a reading-lamp threw a clear soft light over all. The tea, the cream, the brown bread and butter, the fresh eggs, and the honey—all were of the very best—even the waiting-maid was pretty, and had something of the old lady's smile.

When she had finished her duties by taking away the things, and putting the tea-table into a corner, the two friends drew up to the fire.

"You look better for tea, my child," said the little old lady. "Do you eat enough at home?"

"As much as I can," said Ida; "but I am more hungry when somebody else has tea with me. There very seldom was anybody till you came though. Only once or twice Lady Cheetham's housekeeper has been to tea. She is Nurse's father's first cousin, and 'quite the lady,' Nurse says. So she won't let her have tea in the kitchen, so both she and Nurse have tea in the nursery, and we have lots of tea-cakes and jam, and Nurse keeps saying, 'Help yourself, Miss Ida! Make yourself at home, Mrs. Savory!' And, you know, at other times, she's always telling me not to be all night over my tea. So I generally eat a good deal then, and I often laugh, for Nurse and Mrs. Savory are so funny together. But Mrs. Savory's very kind, and last time she came she brought me a pincushion, and the time before she gave me a Spa mug and two apples."

Mrs. Overthaway laughed, too, at Ida's rambling account, and the two were in high good-humour.

"What shall I do to amuse you?" asked the little old lady.

"You couldn't tell me another story?"

said Ida, with an accent that meant, "I hope you can!"

"I would, gladly, my dear, but I don't know what to tell you about;" and she looked round the room as if there were stories in the furniture, which perhaps there were. Ida's eyes followed her, and then she remembered the picture, and said:

"Oh! would you please tell me what the writing means under that pretty little sketch?"

The little old lady smiled rather sadly, and looked at the sketch in silence for a few moments. Then she said:

"It is Russian, my dear. Their letters are different from ours. The words are 'Reka Dom,' and they mean 'River House.'"

Ida gazed at the drawing with increased interest.

"Oh, do you remember anything about it? If you would tell me about *that*!" she cried.

But Mrs. Overthaway was silent again. She was looking down, and twisting some of the rings upon her little hand, and Ida felt ashamed of having asked.

"I beg your pardon," she said, imploringly. "I was very rude, dear Mrs. Overthaway; tell me what you like, please."

"You are a good child," said the little old lady, "a very good child, my dear. I *do* remember so much about that house, that I fall into day-dreams when I look at it. It brings back the memories of a great deal of pleasure, and a great deal of pain. But it is one advantage of being old, little Ida, that Time softens the painful remembrances, and leaves us the happy ones, which grow clearer every day."

"Is it about yourself?" Ida asked, timidly. She had not quite understood the little old lady's speech; indeed, she did not understand many things that Mrs. Overthaway said, but they were very satisfactory companions for all that.

"Yes, it is about myself. And since there is a dear child who cares about old Mrs. Overtheway, and her prosy stories, and all that befell her long ago," said the little old lady, smiling affectionately at Ida, "I will tell her the story—my story—the story of Reka Dom."

"Oh, how good of you!" cried Ida.

"There is not much merit in it," said the little old lady. "The story is as much for myself as you. I tell myself bits of it every evening after tea, more so now than I used to do. I look far back, and I endeavour to look far forward. I try to picture a greater happiness, and companionship more perfect than any I have known; and when I shall be able to realize them, I shall have found a better Home than Reka Dom."

Ida crept to the little old lady's feet, and softly stroked the slipper that rested on the fender. Then, while the March wind howled beyond the curtains, she made herself a cosy corner by the fire, and composed herself to hear the story.

"I remember," said Mrs. Overtheway. "I remember Reka Dom. It was our new home.

"Circumstances had made it necessary that we should change our residence, and the new home was to be in a certain quiet little town, not much bigger than some big villages—a town of pebbled streets and small shops, silent, sunny, and rather dull—on the banks of a river.

"My health at this time was far from robust; but there is compensation even for being delicate in that spring-time of youth, when the want of physical strength is most irksome. If evening parties are forbidden, and long walks impossible, the fragile member of the family is, on the other hand, the first to be considered in the matter of small comforts, or when there is an opportunity for 'change of air.' I experienced this on the occasion when our

new home was chosen. It had been announced to us that our father and mother were going away for one night, and that we were to be very good in the absence of those authorized keepers of the peace. We had not failed ourselves to enlarge this information by the discovery that they were going to the little town by the river, to choose the house that was to be our home; but it was not till the night before their departure that I was told that I was to go with them. I had been unusually drooping, and it was supposed that the expedition would revive me. My own joy was unbounded, and that of my brothers and sisters was hardly less. They were generously glad for my sake, and they were glad, also, that one of the nursery conclave should be on the spot when the great choice was made. We had a shrewd suspicion that in the selection of a house our elders would be mainly influenced by questions of healthy situation, due drainage, good water supply, moderate rent, and so forth; to the neglect of more important considerations, such as odd corners for hide-and-seek, deep window-seats, plenty of cupboards, and a garden adapted to the construction of bowers rather than to the cultivation of vegetables. I do not think my hopes of influencing the parental decision were great; but still we all felt that it was well that I should be there, and my importance swelled with every piece of advice I received from the rest of the party.

"It must be a big house, but, of course, that adds to the expense," said one of the elder boys, who prided himself upon being more grown-up in his views than the rest, and considering the question from an elderly point of view. 'But if you don't take it out one way, you have it another,' he continued. A manly-sounding sentence, which impressed us all. 'Don't think about smartness, Mary,' he went on, with a grand air of renouncing vanities;

'fine entrance, you know, and front door. But a good back yard, if possible, and some empty outhouses for carpenters' shops; and if you could meet with a place with a few old boxes and barrels lying about, for rafts on the river and so forth, it would be a good thing.'

"'I want a tidy box for a new baby-house, *dreadfully*,' added a sister.

"'I hope there'll be deep window-places,' sighed the luxurious Fatima, 'with print patchwork cushions, like those at the farm. And I hope some of them will face west, for the sunsets.'

"'Above all'—and it was the final and most impressive charge I received—'whatever else is wanting, let us have two tall trees for a swing.'

"Laden with responsibility, but otherwise light-hearted enough, I set out with my parents by the early coach, which was to put us down about mid-day in the little town by the river.

"I liked travelling with my father. What a father he was! But, indeed, he was an object of such special devotion to me, and his character exercised so strong an influence over my young days, that I think, my dear Ida, that I must take the old woman's privilege of discursiveness, and tell you something about him.

"I remember that he was a somewhat mysterious personage in our young eyes. We knew little of his early life, and what we did know only enhanced the romantic mystery which we imagined to hang round it. We knew that he had seen many foreign lands, and in those days much travelling was rare. This accounted for the fact that, absent and somewhat impractical as he was at home, he was invaluable on a journey, making arrangements, and managing officials with the precision of old habit. Where he had learnt his peculiar courtesy and helpfulness with those under his charge was less obvious. My mother

said he had been accustomed to 'good society' in his youth, though we lived quietly enough now. We knew that, as a lad, he had been at sea, and sailors are supposed to be a handy and gentle-mannered race with the weak and dependent. Where else he had been and what he had done, we did not exactly know; but I think we vaguely believed him to have been concerned in not a few battles by land and sea; to be deep in secrets of state, and to have lived on terms of intimacy with several kings and queens. His appearance was sufficiently striking to favour our dreams on his behalf. He had a tall, ungainly figure, made more ungainly by his odd, absent ways; but withal he was an unmistakable gentleman. I have heard it said of him that he was a man from whom no errors in taste could be feared, and with whom no liberties could ever be taken. He had thick hair of that yellow over which age seems to have no power, and a rugged face, wonderfully lighted up by eyes of rare germander blue. His hair sometimes seemed to me typical of his mind and tastes, which Time never robbed of their enthusiasm.

"With age and knowledge the foolish fancies I wove about my father melted away, but the peculiar affection I felt for him, over and above my natural love as a daughter, only increased as I grew up. Our tastes were harmonious, and we always understood each other; whereas Fatima was apt to be awed by his stateliness, puzzled by his jokes, and at times provoked by his eccentricities. Then I was never very robust in my youth; and the refined and considerate politeness which he made a point of displaying in his own family were peculiarly grateful to me. That good manners (like charity) should begin at home, was a pet principle with him, and one which he often insisted upon to us.

“‘If you will take my advice, young people,’ he would say, ‘you will be careful never to let your sisters find other young gentlemen more ready and courteous, nor your brothers find other young ladies more gentle and obliging than those at home.’

“My father certainly practised what he preached, and it would not have been easy to find a more kind and helpful travelling companion than the one with whom my mother and I set forth that early morning in search of our new abode.

“I was just becoming too much tired to care to look any longer out of the window, when the coach rumbled over the pebbly street into the courtyard of the Saracen’s Head.

“I had never stayed at an inn before. What a palace of delights it seemed to me! It is true that the meals were neither better nor better cooked than those at home, and that the little room devoted to my use was far from being as dainty as that which Fatima and I habitually shared; but the keen zest of novelty pervaded everything, and the faded chintz and wavy looking-glass of No. 25 are pleasant memories still. Moreover, it had one real advantage over my own bedroom. High up, at the back of the house, it looked out and down upon the river. How the water glittered and sparkled! The sun was reflected from its ripples as if countless hosts of tiny naiads each held up a mirror to catch his rays. My home had been inland, and at some distance from a river, and the sight of water was new and charming to me. I could see people strolling along the banks; and then a boat carrying sails of a rich warm brown came into view and passed slowly under my eyes, with a stately grace and a fair wind. I was watching her with keen interest, when I was summoned to dinner.

“Here, again, novelty exercised its charm. At home I think I may say that

the nursery party without exception regarded dinner in the light of a troublesome necessity of existence. We were apt to grudge the length and formalities of the meal; to want to go out, or not to want to come in; or possibly the dining-room had been in use as a kite manufactory, or a juvenile artist’s studio, or a doll’s dress-maker’s establishment, and we objected to make way for the roast meat and pudding. But on this occasion I took an interest in the dignities of the dinner-table, and examined the plates and dishes, and admired the old-fashioned forks and spoons, and puzzled over the entwined initials on their handles.

“After dinner we went out into the town, and looked through several houses which were to let. My high hopes and eager interest in the matter were soon quenched by fatigue; but, faithful to my promise, I examined each house in turn. None of them proved satisfactory to my parents, and they were even less so to me. They were all new, all commonplace, and all equally destitute of swing-trees, interesting corners, deep window-seats, or superannuated boxes. Heat, fatigue, and disappointment at last so overpowered me that my pale face attracted notice, and my father brought me back to the inn. He carried me upstairs to the sofa, and pointing out a bookshelf for my amusement, and telling me to order tea if I wished for it, went back to my mother.

“It was a shabby little collection of volumes, that parlour library in the ‘Saracen’s Head.’ There was an old family Bible, a torn copy of Culpepper’s ‘Herbal,’ the Homilies in inexpressibly greasy black calf, a book of songs, a volume called ‘Evelina,’ which seemed chiefly remarkable for dashes and notes of admiration, and—the book I chose.

“The book I chose would look very dull in your eyes, I dare say, my dear Ida; you

who live in an age of bright, smart story-books, with clear type, coloured pictures, and gorgeous outsides. You don't know what small, mean, inartistic 'cuts' enlivened your grandmother's nursery library, that is, when the books were illustrated at all. You have no idea how very little amusement was blended with the instruction, and how much instruction with the amusement in our playbooks then, and how few there were of them, and how precious those few were! You can hardly imagine what a treasure I seemed to have found in a volume which contained several engravings the size of the page, besides many small wood-cuts scattered through the letter-press. I lost sight alike of fatigue and disappointment, as I pored over the pictures, and read bits here and there.

"And such charming pictures there were! With quaint anglers in steeple-crowned hats, setting forth to fish, or breakfasting under a tree (untrammelled by the formalities of a nursery meal), or bringing their spoils to a wayside inn with a painted fish upon the signboard, and a hostess in a high hat and a stiff-bustled dress at the door. Then there were small woodcuts which one might have framed for a doll's house; portraits of fish of all kinds, not easily distinguishable by the unpractised eye; and nicer woodcuts still of country scenes, and country towns, and almost all of these with a river in them. By the time that my father and mother returned, I had come to the conclusion that the bank of a river was, of all situations, the most desirable for one's home, and had built endless bowers in the air like that in which the anglers are seated in the picture entitled 'The Farewell;' and had imagined myself in a tall hat and a stiff-bustled dress cooking fish for my favourite brothers after the receipts in Walton and Cotton's 'Complete Angler.'

"They came back with disappointment on their faces. They had not got a house, but my mother had got a headache, and we sat down to tea a dispirited party.

"It is sometimes fortunate as well as remarkable, how soon everybody knows everything about everybody else, especially in a small town. As the tea-things went downstairs, our landlord came up to help us in our difficulty. Had the gentleman succeeded in obtaining a house? If none of the new lot suited him, the landlord believed that one or more of older date were to let near the river. It was not the fashionable quarter, but there had been well-to-do people and some good substantial residences there.

"Our hopes rose again, and the idea of an old and substantial residence in an unfashionable quarter was so much more favourable to nursery interests than the smart gimcrack houses at which we had been looking, that I should have been anxious to explore that part of the town to which he directed us, even if it had not possessed a charm that was now pre-eminent in my eyes. It was near the river.

"My mother was too much tired to attempt further investigations, but I had completely recovered from my fatigues, and was allowed to go with my father on the new search. He and I were very good company, despite the difference in age between us. We were never in each other's way, and whether we chatted or did not speak, we were happy together, and enjoyed ourselves in our respective fashions.

"It was a lovely evening. Hand in hand we turned out of the 'Saracen's Head' into the shingly street, took the turning which led to the unfashionable quarter, and strolled on and on, in what Scott calls 'social silence.' I was very happy. It was not only a lovely evening—it was one of those when the sunlight seems no longer mere sunlight, but has a

kind of magical glow, as if a fairy spell had been cast over everything; when all houses look interesting—all country lanes inviting—when each hedge, or ditch, or field seems a place made to play in at some wonderful game that should go on for years.

"As we wandered on, we passed a line of small bright-looking houses, which strongly caught my fancy. Each had its gay little garden, its shrubbery of lilac, holly, or laurustinus, and its creeper-covered porch. They looked so compact and cosy, so easy to keep tidy, so snug and sunny, that one fancied the people who lived in them must be happy, and wondered who they were.

"‘Oh, father!’ I exclaimed, ‘what delightful houses!’

"‘They are very pretty, my dear,’ he answered; ‘but they are much too small for us; besides which, they are all occupied.’

"I sighed, and we were passing on, when I held him back with another exclamation.

"‘Oh! look at the carnations!’ for in one of the gardens large clumps of splendid scarlet cloves caught my eye.

"My father humoured me, and we drew near to the laurustinus hedge, and looked over into the gay little garden. As we looked, we became conscious of what appeared like a heap or bundle of clothing near one of the beds, which on lifting itself up, proved to be a tall slender lady of middle age, who, with her dress tucked neatly round her, a big print hood on her head, and a trowel in her hand, was busily administering such tender little attentions as mothers will lavish on their children, and garden lovers on their flowers. She was not alone in the garden, as we soon perceived. A shorter and stouter and younger lady sat knitting by the side of a gentleman in a garden-chair, who, from

some defect in his sight, wore a large green shade, which hid the greater part of his face. The shade was made of covered pasteboard, and was large and round, and so very like a lamp-shade, that I hardly ever look at one of those modern round globe lamps, my dear, if it has a green shade, without being reminded of old Mr. Brooke.

"‘Was that his name?’ Ida asked.

"‘Yes, my dear; but that we did not know till afterwards. When the good lady lifted herself up, she saw us, and seemed startled. My father raised his hat, and apologized politely. ‘My little girl was so much taken with your carnations, madam,’ he said, ‘that we made bold to come near enough to look at them, not knowing that any one was in the garden.’

"She seemed rather flustered, but pushed back her hood, and made a stiff little curtsey in answer to my father’s bow, and murmured something about our being welcome.

"‘Would you care to have some, my dear?’ she added, looking at me. I gave a delighted assent, and she had gathered two lovely carnations, when we heard a quavering voice from under the green shade inquire—

"‘What is it?’

"Our friend was at the old gentleman’s side in a moment, speaking very distinctly into his ear, as if he were deaf, whereby we heard her answer,

"‘It’s a gentleman and his little daughter, James, admiring our carnations, and I am gathering a few for the young lady, dear James.’

"‘Quite right, quite right,’ he croaked. ‘Anything that we have. Anything that we have have.’

"It was a great satisfaction to me afterwards to remember that my father had thanked these good people ‘properly,’ as I considered. As for myself, I had only

been able to blush and stammer out something that was far from expressing my delight with the lovely nosegay I received. Then the slender lady went back to her gardening. Her sister took up the knitting which she had laid down, the old gentleman nodded his lamp-shade in the direction where he supposed us to be, and said, 'Good evening, sir, Good evening, miss;' and we went our way.

"The road wound on and on, and down and down, until we found ourselves on the edge of the river. A log lay conveniently on the bank, and there we seated ourselves. The tide was out, and the river bed was a bed of mud, except for a narrow stream of water that ran down the middle. But ah! how the mud glistened in the evening sunshine which was reflected on it in prismatic colours. Little figures were dotted here and there over its surface, and seawards the masts of some vessels loomed large through the shining haze.

"How beautiful everything looks this evening!' I exclaimed.

"I see them walking in an air of glory,' murmured my father, dreamily.

"He was quoting from a favourite old poem, which begins—

'They are all gone into a world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here.'

"This 'air of glory,' indeed, was over everything. The mud and the tide pools, the dark human figures, the black and white seagulls that sat like onyx pebbles on the river bed, the stream that spread seawards like a silver scroll, the swans that came sailing, sailing down the stream with just such a slow and stately pace as white-winged ships might have come down the river with the tide, to pass (as the swans did pass) into that 'world of light,' that shining seaward haze, where your eye

could not follow them unless shaded by your hand.

"I do not quite know how long we sat gazing before us in silent enjoyment. Neither do I know what my father's thoughts were, as he sat with his hands clasped on his knees and his blue eyes on the river. For my own part, I fancied myself established in one of the little houses as 'hostess,' with a signboard having a fish painted upon it hanging outside the door, and a bower of woodbine, sweetbriar, jessamine, and myrtle commanding a view of the river. The day-dream was broken by my father's voice.

"Mary, my dear, we must go about our business, or what will your mother say to us? We must see after these houses. We can't live on the river's bank.'

"I wish we could,' I sighed; and though he had risen and turned away, I lingered still. At this moment my father exclaimed—

"Bless my soul!' and I jumped up and turned round.

"He was staring at a wall with a gateway in it, enclosing a house and garden on the other side of the road. On the two gateposts were printed in black Roman letters two words that I could not understand—*Reka Dom*.

"What does it mean?' I asked.

"Reka Dom,' said my father, thoughtfully (and he pronounced it *Rayka Dome*). 'It is Russian. It means River House. Very curious! I suppose the people who live here are Russians. It's a nice situation—a lovely view—*lovely!*' and he had turned round to the river, but I caught his arm.

"Father, dear, no one lives here. Look!' and I pointed to a board beyond the gateway, which stated in plain English that the house was to let.

¹ "Departed Friends." Henry Vaughan, 1654.

"By the time that we returned to my

mother, Reka Dom was to all intents and purposes our home.

"It is true that the house was old, rambling, and out of repair, and that what we heard of the landlord was not encouraging. He was rich, we were told, but miserly; and 'a very queer old gentleman,' whose oddness almost amounted to insanity. He had 'made himself so unpleasant' to various people who had thought of taking the house, that they drew back, and Reka Dom had been untenanted for some time. The old woman who took care of it, and from whom we got this information, prophesied further that he would 'do nothing to the old place. He'd let it fall about his ears first.'

"It is also true that standing in the garden (which in its rambling, disorderly way was charming, and commanded a lovely view), my father, who had doffed his hat, as he often did in a country spot where the air was fresh and pleasant, ran one hand ruefully through his thick yellow hair, and said—

"'You know, Mary, your mother's chief objection to our latest home was that the grounds were so much too large for our means of keeping them in order; and this garden is the larger of the two, I fear.'

"And he did not seem to derive proportionate comfort from my reply.

"'But, father dear, you know you needn't keep it in order, and then we can have it to play in.'

"And yet we took Reka Dom.

"The fact is that my father and I took a fancy to the place. On my side this is easily to be accounted for. If all the other houses at which we had looked had proved the direct reverse of what I (on behalf of myself and my brothers and sisters) was in search of, Reka Dom in a remarkable degree answered our requirements. To explore the garden was like a tour in fairy land. It was oddly laid out. Three grass-

plots or lawns, one behind another, were divided by hedges of honeysuckle and sweetbriar. The grass was long, the flower-borders were borders of desolation, where crimson peonies and some other hardy perennials made the best of it, but the odour of the honeysuckle was deliciously sweet in the evening air. And what a place for bowers! The second lawn had greater things in store for me. There, between two tall elm trees, hung a swing. With a cry of delight, I seated myself, seized the ropes, and gave a vigorous push. But the impetus was strong, and the ropes were rotten, and I and the swing came to the ground together. This did not deter me, however, from exploring the third lawn, where I made a discovery to which that of the swing was as nothing.

"It was not merely that a small path through the shrubbery led me into a little enclosed piece of ground devoted to those many-shaped, box-edged little flower-beds characteristic of 'children's gardens,'—it was not alone that the beds were shaped like letters, and that there was indisputably an M among them,—but they were six in number. Just one apiece for myself and my brothers and sisters! And though families of six children are not so very uncommon as to make it improbable that my father's predecessor should have had the same number of young ones as himself, the coincidence appeared to my mind almost supernatural. It really seemed as if some kind old fairy had conjured up the whole place for our benefit. And—bless the good godmother!—to crown all, there were two old tea-chests and a bottomless barrel in the yard.

"Doubtless many causes influenced my father in *his* leaning towards Reka Dom, and he did not confide them to me. But I do truly believe that first and foremost of the attractions was its name. To a real hearty lover of languages there is a charm

in the sight of a strange character new words, a yet unknown tongue, which cannot be explained to those who do not share the taste. And perhaps next to the mystic attraction of words whose meaning is yet hidden, is to discover traces of a foreign language in some unexpected and unlikely place. Russian is not extensively cultivated; my father's knowledge of it was but slight, and this quiet little water-side town an unlikely place for an inscription in that language. It was curious, and then interesting, and then the quaint simple title of the house took his fancy. Besides this, though he could not but allow that there was reason in my mother's views on the subject of large grounds in combination with one man-of-all-work, he liked plenty of space and shrubbery where he could wander about—his hands behind his back—without being disturbed; and for his own part he had undoubtedly felt more pleasure in the possession of large grounds than annoyance at seeing them neglected. So the garden tempted him. Finally, there was a room opening upon a laurel walk, which had at one time been a library. The shelves—old, common, dirty, and broken—were still there, and on the most secure of them the housekeeper kept her cheese and candles, and an old shawl and bonnet.

"The place is made for us!" I exclaimed on my return from discovering the old barrel and tea-chests. My father was standing in the library looking out upon the garden, and he did not say No.

"From the old woman we learnt something of the former tenants. She was a good-natured old soul, with an aggrieved tone of voice, due probably to the depressing effects of keeping an empty house for a cantankerous landlord. The former tenant's name was Smith, she said (unmistakably English this!). But his lady was a *Roosian*, he believed. They had lived in *Roosia*, and some of the children, having

been born there, were little *Roosians*, and had *Roosian* names. She could not speak herself, having no knowledge of the country, but she had heard that the *Roosians* were heathens, though Mr. Smith and his family went regularly to church. They had lived by a river, she believed, and their old home was called by the same outlandish name they had given to this. She had heard that it meant a house by the water-side, but could not say, knowing no language but her own, and having (she was thankful to say) found it sufficient for all purposes. She knew that before Mr. Smith's time the house was called Montague Mount, and there was some sense in that name. Though what the sense was, she did not offer to explain.

"Please, please take it!" I whispered in a pause of the conversation; 'there are six little gardens, and——'

"My father broke in with mock horror on his face: 'Don't speak of six gardens!' he exclaimed. 'The one will condemn the place, I fear, but we must go home and consult your mother.'

"I suppose we did consult her.

"I know we described all the charms of the house and garden, and passed rather a poor examination as to their condition, and what might be expected of the landlord. That my father endeavoured to conceal his personal bias, and that I made no secret of mine. At last my mother interrupted some elaborately practical details by saying in her gentle voice—

"I think choosing a home is something like choosing a companion for life. It is chiefly important to like it. There must be faults everywhere. Do you take to the place, my dear?"

"I like it certainly," said my father. 'But the question is not what I like, but what you like.'

"Then I knew it was settled, and breathed freely. For though my father

always consulted my mother's wishes, she generally contrived to choose what she knew he would prefer. And she chose Reka Dom.

"Henceforth good luck seemed to follow our new home.

"First, as to the landlord. The old woman had certainly not exaggerated his oddity. But one of his peculiarities was a most fortunate one for us. He was a bibliomaniac—a lover and collector of valuable and curious books. When my father called on him to arrange about the house, he found him sitting almost in rags, apparently dining upon some cheese-parings, and surrounded by a library, the value of which would have fed and clothed him with comfort for an almost indefinite period. Upon the chair behind him sat a large black cat with yellow eyes.

"When my father was ushered in, he gazed for a moment in silent astonishment at the unexpected sight. Books in shelf after shelf up to the ceiling, and piled in heaps upon the floor. As he stood speechless, the little old man put down the plate, gathered his ragged dressing-gown about him, and, followed by the cat, scrambled across the floor and touched his arm.

"‘You look at books as if you loved them?’ he said.

"My father sighed as if a spell had been broken.

"‘I am nearly half a century old,’ he said, ‘and I do not remember the day when I did not love them.’

"He confessed afterwards to my mother that not less than two hours elapsed before Reka Dom was so much as spoken of. Then his new acquaintance was as anxious to secure him for a tenant as he had been to take the house.

"‘Put down on paper what you think wants doing, and it shall be done,’ was the old gentleman's liberal order on the sub-

ject of repairs. ‘Dear, dear, dear!’ he went on, ‘it's one thing to have you, and another thing to put the house right for men who don't know an Elzevir from an annual in red silk. One fellow came here who would have given me five pounds more than I wanted for the place; but he put his vile hat upon my books. Dear, dear, dear!’

"The old man's strongest effort in my father's favour, however, was the proposal of a glass of wine. He seemed to have screwed himself up to the offer, and to be proportionately relieved when it was declined.

"‘You're quite right,’ he said frankly; ‘my wine is not so good as my books. Come and see them whenever you like.’

"‘The book-shelves shall be repaired, sir,’ was his final promise in answer to a hint from my father, who (it being successful, and he being a very straightforward man) was ever afterwards ashamed of this piece of diplomacy. ‘And the fire-place must be seen to. Dear, dear, dear! A man can live anywhere, but valuable books must be taken care of. Would you believe it? I have a fire in this room three times a week in bad weather. And fuel is terribly dear, terribly dear. And that slut in the kitchen burns as much as if she had the care of the Vatican Library: She said she couldn't roast the meat without. ‘Then give me cold meat!’ I said; but she roasts and boils all the same. So last week I forbade the butcher the house, and we've lived on cheese ever since, and *that's* eightpence a pound. Food is terribly dear here, sir; everything is dear. It's enough to ruin a man. And you've got a family. Dear, dear, dear! How a man can keep a family and books together, I can't imagine. However, I suppose children live chiefly on porridge.’

"Which supposition served for long as a household joke against my brothers,

whose appetite for roast meat was not less than that of other healthy boys of the period.

"It was a happy moment when my father came back from this interview, and Reka Dom was fairly ours. But a more delightful one was that in which I told the successful result of my embassy to the nursery conclave. I certainly had not the remotest claim to credit in the matter, but I received an ovation proportionate to the good news I brought. I told my story skilfully, and made the six gardens the crowning point; at which climax my brother and sisters raised a shout that so far exceeded the average of even nursery noises, that my mother hurried to the spot, where our little sister Phil flung herself into her arms, and almost sobbing with excitement, cried—

"'Oh, Mother dear! we're *hooraying* for Reka Dom!'

"It was sagely prophesied by our nurse and others that we should soon be tired of our new fancy, and find 'plenty to complain of' in Reka Dom as elsewhere. (It is nursery wisdom to chasten juvenile enthusiasm by such depressing truths.) And undoubtedly both people and places are apt to disappoint one's expectations on intimate acquaintance; but there are people and places who keep love always, and such an one was Reka Dom.

"I hardly know what to tell you of it, Ida. The happy years we spent there were marked by no wonderful occurrences, and were not enlivened by any particular gaiety. Beyond our own home our principal treat was to take tea in the snug little house where we made our first acquaintances. Those good ladies proved kind friends to us. Their buns were not to be surpassed, and they had pale albums, and faded treasures of the preceding generation, which it was our delight to over-

haul. The two sisters lived with their invalid brother, and that was the household. Their names were Martha and Mary, and they cherished a touching bit of sentiment in reference to the similarity between their circumstances and those of the Family of Bethany.

"'I think it reminds us of what we ought to be, my dear,' Miss Mary said to me one day. 'Only it is I who should have been called Martha, for Martha is far more spiritually minded.' Humility was the most prominent virtue in the character of these good ladies, and they carried it almost to excess.

"I remember as a child thinking that even the holy sisters of Bethany could hardly have been more good than the Misses Brook, but I was quite unable to connect any sentiment with the invalid brother. He spoke little and did less, and yet his sisters continually quoted his sayings and criticisms, and spoke of his fine taste and judgment; but of all that he was supposed to say, only a few croaking common-places ever met our ears.

"'Dear James was so much pleased with that little translation you showed me,' or, 'Dear James hopes that his young friends keep up their practising. He considers music such a resource,' &c. &c.

"I believe they did hold conversations with him in which he probably assented to their propositions, and they persuaded themselves that he was very good company. And indeed he may have been all that they believed; I can only say that to me dear James's remarks never exceeded, 'Good day, Miss. How are your excellent parents?' or some similar civility. I really was afraid of him. There is something appalling in a hoarse voice coming from under a green shade, and connected with eyes you cannot meet, and features that are always hidden. Beyond that shade we never saw to the day of his death.

"This occurred about four years after we first knew them. I well remember the visit of condolence on which I accompanied my mother, the bitter grief of the sisters, and the slow dropping of Miss Mary's tears on to her black dress. Wonderful indeed is love! The most talented and charming companion in the world could not have filled to them the place of the helpless, uninteresting invalid who had passed away.

"The Misses Brooke caused a commotion in the gossiping world of our little town by going to the funeral. It was not the custom for ladies to go to funerals, and, as a general rule, the timid sisters would not have ventured to act against public opinion; but on this occasion they were resolute. To hear the voice of authority meet them with the very words wherewith Divine lips had comforted those other sisters, would comfort them, as nothing else could. I remember how from a window we watched the funeral with childish awe and curiosity—the thrill with which we heard a maid announce 'the coffin,' and caught sight of the flapping pall, and tried to realize that old Mr. Brooke was underneath. Then close behind it came the two figures we knew so well, veiled, black, and bent, and clinging together in the agony of that struggle between faith and loss which every loving soul is some time called on to endure. As we leant out of the open window, crying bitterly in sympathy with them, and with the gloomy excitement of the occasion, they raised themselves a little and walked more steadily. The rector's clear voice was cutting the air with the pathos of an unusual sympathy.

'I am the Resurrection and the Life—saith the Lord.'

"I understood then, and have never wondered since, how it was that the Misses

Brooke braved the gossip of the neighbourhood, and followed their brother's body to the grave.

"These good people were, as I have said, our chief friends; but Reka Dom itself afforded us ample amusement. The six children who had lived there before us were a source of unflinching interest. The old woman of the house remained about the place for a short time in the capacity of charwoman, and she suffered many inquiries on our part as to the names, ages, and peculiarities of our predecessors. As she had 'charred' for them, she was able to satisfy our curiosity to a considerable extent, and then great was the pleasure of retailing to our mother, as she sat knitting in the twilight, the anecdotes we had collected of 'the Little Russians.'

"'The Little Russians' certainly did much to cement our attachment to Reka Dom. Their history was the history of our home. It was the romance of the walks we played in, the swing we sat in, the gardens we tended every day. To play at being the Little Russians superseded all other games. To 'pretend' that the Little Russians were with us, and to give dolls' entertainments in their honour, supplanted all former fancies. Their gardens, by-the-by, were not allotted to their successors without some difficulty, and the final decision involved a disappointment to me. It seemed as if there could not be two opinions as to the propriety of my having the letter M. But on further consideration it appeared that as the remaining letters did not fit the names of my brothers and sisters, some other way of distributing them must be found. My mother at last decided that the letters of the six beds were to be written on six separate bits of paper, and put in a bag, and that one was to be drawn by each in turn. I still hoped that I might draw the letter M, but it was not to be. That large and sunny bed fell to

my youngest brother, and I drew the letter I. Now not only was the bed little more than a fourth of the size of that which I had looked on as my own, but being very much in the shade, it was not favourable to flowers. Then the four divisions of the letter M afforded some scope for those effective arrangements which haunt one's spring dreams for the coming summer; but what could be done with a narrow strip with two narrower ends where the box-edges almost met, and where nothing would blossom but lilies of the valley?

("Capricious things those lilies are! So obdurate under coaxing when transplanted to some place they do not like, so immovably flourishing in a home that suits them!")

"What I did was to make the best of my fate. After trying to reduce the lilies of the valley to one neat group, and to cultivate gayer flowers in the rest of the bed, and after signally failing in both attempts, I begged a bit of spare ground in the big garden for my roses and carnations, and gave up my share of the Russian plot to the luxuriant lilies.

"It had belonged to the eldest boy. One of those born in Russia, and with the outlandish names of which the charwoman spoke. His name was Ivan. Many a time did I wish it had been William or Matthew, and once, I remember, I dreamt a tantalizing dream of discovering that it was Oliver, and digging up the middle of the O, and effecting a round bed of unrivalled brilliancy with a white rose for the centre-piece and crown. Once in the year, however, I had my revenge. In spring my lilies of the valley were the finest to be seen. We had a custom that all through the flower season a bouquet was laid by my mother's plate before she came down to breakfast, and very proud we were when they came from our own gardens. There were no horticultural wonders in these nosegays, but in my

short season of triumph, the size and fragrance of my flowers never failed to excite admiration; and many grown-up people besides my mother were grateful for bouquets from my narrow bed. Credit in the matter I deserved none, for Ivan's lilies took care of themselves.

"Having learnt the names of the little Russians, we had no difficulty in discovering to which of them the respective letter beds had belonged; and one of our amusements was that each should endeavour to carry out what (so far as we could learn) had been the habits and customs of the little Russian to whose garden he had succeeded. Then we had a whole class of partisan games which gave us wonderful entertainment. Sometimes we pretended to be Scottish chieftains, or feudal barons of England, or chiefs of savage tribes. Our gardens were always the lands we had inherited or conquered, and we called ourselves by the names of the little Russians. When we were Highland chiefs, I remember we put Mac indiscriminately before all the names; in some cases with a comical, and in others with a very satisfactory effect. As chief of the MacIvans I felt justly proud of my title, but a brother who represented the MacElizabeths was less fortunate. In the sham battles our pet animals (we each had one) did duty for retainers, much to their bewilderment. The dogs, indeed, would caper about, and bark round the opposing parties in a way that was at least inspiring; but my Sandy Tom brandished his tail and took flying leaps upon no principle whatever, and as to Fatima's tortoise it never budged from the beginning of the conflict to the end. Once, indeed, by strewing dandelion heads in the direction of the enemy's ground she induced him to advance, and at the cry of 'Forward, MacPeters!' he put forth a lazy leg, and with elephantine dignity led the attack, on the way to his favourite food.

But (in spite of the fable) his slow pace was against him, and in the ensuing *mêlée* he was left far behind.

"I could not learn much about Ivan, but of what I did discover some things were easy enough for me to follow. He was fond of boating, a taste I was not allowed to cultivate; but also he was fond of books, the old woman said, and fond of sitting in the swing and reading, and I heartily approved his choice in this respect.

"In helping to unpack my father's library, I had discovered a copy of Walton and Cotton's 'Angler,' similar in every respect, but its good condition, to the one that had charmed me at the inn. Sometimes the precious volume was lent to me, and with it in my lap, and my arms round the ropes of the swing, I passed many a happy hour. What fancies I wove after studying those quaint, suggestive old prints! As sweet as that 'contexture of woodbines, sweetbriar, and myrtle' in which the anglers sat and sipped orange punch at Tottenham. The characters of *Piscator*, *Venator*, and *Auceps*, and the style of their conversations by the wayside, I found by no means unlike those of the Pilgrim's Progress. The life-like descriptions of nature (none the less attractive at my age from being quaintly mixed with fable and symbolism, and pointed with pious morals) went straight to my heart; and though I skipped many of the fish chapters, I re-read many of the others, and 'The Complete Angler' did not a little to feed my strong natural love for out-door life and country pleasures, to confirm my habit of early rising, and to strengthen my attachment to the neighbourhood of a river.

"But my father's library furnished another volume for my garden studies. From him I inherited some of that taste which finds a magic attraction in dictionaries and grammars; and I only wish that I had

properly mastered about half the languages in which it was the delight of my girlhood to dabble. As yet, however, I only looked at the 'grammar corner' with ambitious eyes, till one day there came upon me the desire to learn Russian. I asked my father for a Russian grammar, and he pointed out the only one that he possessed. My father seldom refused to lend us his books, and made no inquiries as to why we wanted them; but he was intensely strict about their proper treatment, so that we early learnt to turn over leaves from the top, to avoid dogs' ears, and generally to treat books properly and put them away punctually. Thus I got the grammar, and carried it off to the swing. Alas! it was not even Russian and English. It was a fat old French edition, interleaved for notes. The notes were my father's, and in English, which was of some assistance, and I set myself resolutely to learn the alphabet. But my progress was slow, and at last I got my father to write *Reka Dom* for me in Russian character, as I had determined to master these few letters first and then proceed. I soon became familiar with them, and was not a little proud of the achievement. I made a large copy to fasten upon the nursery wall; I wrote it in all my books; and Fatima, who could not be induced to attack the fat grammar with me, became equally absorbed on her part in the effort to reduce the inscription to cross-stitch for the benefit of her sampler.

"I borrowed the fat grammar again, and, in spite of my father's warnings that it was too difficult for me as yet, I hoped soon to be proficient in the language of the little Russians. But warnings from one's elders are apt to come true, and after a few vain efforts I left the tough old volume in its corner and took to easier pastimes.

"I had always an inventive turn, and was, as a rule, the director-in-chief of our

amusements. I know I was often very tiresome and tyrannical in the ensuing arrangements, and can only hope the trouble I took on these occasions on behalf of my brothers and sisters, served in their eyes to balance my defects. I remember one device of mine that proved particularly troublesome.

"When sham battles had ended in real quarrels, and following in the footsteps of the little Russians was becoming irksome—(especially to Fatima, whose predecessor—Peter—had been of a military turn, and had begun fortifications near the kitchen garden which she was incompetent to carry out)—a new idea struck me. I announced that letters properly written and addressed to the little Russians, 'Reka Dom, Russia,' and posted in the old rhubarb-pot by the tool-house, would be duly answered. The replies to be found in a week's time at the same office.

"The announcement was received with delight, and no doubt was ever expressed as to the genuineness of the answers which I regularly supplied, written, by-the-by, in excellent English, but with Reka Dom neatly effected in Russian characters on the note-paper. In the first place, I allowed no awkward inquiries into the machinery of my little plots for the benefit of the rest; and in the second, we had all, I think, a sort of half-and-half belief, a wilful credulity in reference to our many fancies (such as fairies and the like), of which it is impossible to give the exact measure. But when, the six weekly letters having become rather burdensome, I left off writing answers from Ivan to myself, the others began to inquire why Ivan never wrote now. As usual, I refused to give any explanations, and after inventing several for themselves which answered for a while, they adopted by general consent an idea put forth by little Phillis. The child was sitting one day with her fat cheek on

her hand, and her eyes on the rhubarb-pot, waiting for her share of the correspondence to be read aloud to her, when the fancy seemed to strike her, and she said quietly, but with an air of full conviction—

"*I know what it is—Ivan is dead.*"

"The idea took strange hold of us all. We said, 'Perhaps he is dead,' and spoke and thought of him as dead, till I think we were fully persuaded of it. No chair was set for him at the dolls' feasts, and I gained a sort of melancholy distinction as being without a partner now. 'You know Mary has no little Russian, since Ivan is dead.'

"When our visible pets died, we buried them with much pomp, to the sound of a drum and a tin trumpet, in a piece of ground by the cabbage-bed; but in the present instance that ceremony was impossible. We resolved, however, to erect a gravestone to the memory of our fancy friend in his own garden. I had seen letters cut on stone, and was confident that with a chisel and hammer nothing could be easier. These the nursery tool-box furnished. I wrote out an elaborate inscription headed by Reka Dom in Russian characters, and we got a stone and set to work. The task, however, was harder than we had supposed. My long composition was discarded, and we resolved to be content with this simple sentence, *To the memory of Ivan*. But 'brevity is the soul of wit,' and the TO took so long to cut, that we threw out three more words, and the epitaph finally stood thus:

TO IVAN.

"In a rude fashion this was accomplished; and with crape on our arms and the accustomed music we set up the stone among the lilies.

"In time, Ida, we grew up, as it is



"—we resolved to be content with this simple sentence, *To the memory of Ivan.* But 'brevity is the soul of wit,' and the TO took so long to cut, that we threw out three more words, and the epitaph finally stood thus :

TO IVAN."

(P. 86.)

called. Almost before we knew it, and whilst we still seemed to be looking forward to our emancipation from nursery authority and childish frocks, Fatima and I found ourselves grown-up young ladies, free to fashion our costume to our own tastes, and far from Reka Dom. Yes, we had changed our home again. The River House was ours no longer. Childhood also had slipped from our grasp, but slowly as the years had seemed to pass, they had not sufficed to accomplish every project we had made in them. Not one of those long summers by the river had seen that gorgeous display of flowers in our garden which in all good faith and energy we planned with every spring. I had not learnt Russian. Years had gone by since I first took up the fat grammar, but I had acquired little since that time beyond the familiar characters of the well-beloved name, Reka Dom.

"The country town that circumstances had now made our home possessed at least one attraction for us. It was here that our old friends the Misses Brooke had settled when their brother's death broke up the quiet little household. I was very fond of the good ladies; not less so now than I had been as a child, when their home-made buns and faded albums made an evening festive, and were looked forward to as a treat. They were good women, severe to themselves and charitable to others, who cultivated the grace of humility almost in excess. One little weakness, however, in their otherwise estimable characters had at times disturbed the even course of our friendship. I hardly know what to call it. It was not want of candour. More truthful women do not exist than they were, and I believe they never wilfully deceived any one. I can only describe it as a habit of indulging in small plots and suspicions; a want of trust in other people, partly traceable,

perhaps, to a lack of due confidence in themselves, but which was very provoking to one as young, eager, and sincerely affectionate as I was. I was indignant to discover little plots laid to test my sincerity; and to find my genuine (if not minutely measured), expressions of feeling doubted. If this peculiarity had been troublesome in the early stages of our acquaintance, it was doubly so when we met again, after the lapse of some years. For one thing, the dear ladies were older, and fidgety, foolish little weaknesses of this kind sometimes increase with years. Then I was older also, and if they had doubted their own powers of entertainment when I was a child, they would still less believe that I could enjoy their society now that I was a 'young lady.' Whereas the truth was, that though my taste for buns and my reverence for smooth pencil drawings in impossible perspective had certainly diminished, my real enjoyment of a quiet evening with my old friends was greater than before. I liked to take my sewing to their undisturbed fireside, and not a few pieces of work which had flagged under constant interruptions at home were rapidly finished as I chatted with them. I liked to draw out the acquirements which they would not believe that they possessed. I enjoyed rubbing my modern and desultory reading against their old-fashioned but solid knowledge. I admired their high and delicate principles, and respected their almost fatiguing modesty. At an age when religious questions move and often seriously trouble girls' minds, I drew comfort from their piety, which (although as quiet and modest as all their other virtues) had been for years, under my eyes, the ruling principle of all they did, the only subject on which they had the courage to speak with decision, the crown of their affections and pleasures, and the sufficient consolation of their sorrow. In addition

to all this, when I went to them, I knew that my visit gave pleasure.

"It seemed hard that they could not always repose a similar confidence in me. And yet so it was. The consistent affection of years had failed to convince them that 'a young, pretty, lively girl' (as they were pleased to call me) could find pleasure in the society of 'two dull old women.' So they were apt to suspect either a second motive for my visit, or affectation in my appearance of enjoyment. At times I was chafed almost beyond my powers of endurance by these fancies; and on one occasion my vexation broke all bounds of respect.

"'You think me uncandid, ma'am,' I cried; 'and what are you? If you were to hear that I had spoken of you, elsewhere, as two dull old women, you would be as much astonished as angered. You know you would. You know you don't think I think so. I can't imagine why you say it!'

"And my feelings being as much in the way of my logic as those of most other women, I got no further, but broke down into tears.

"'She says we're uncandid, Mary,' sobbed Miss Martha.

"'So we are, I believe,' said Miss Mary, and then we all cried together.

"I think the protracted worry of this misunderstanding (which had been a long one) had made me almost hysterical. I clearly remember the feeling of lying with my face against the horsehair sofa in the little dining-room, feebly repeating, 'You shouldn't, you know. You shouldn't!' amid my tears, my hair being softly stroked the while by the two sisters, who comforted me, and blamed themselves with a depth of self-abasement that almost made me laugh. It had hardly seemed possible that their customary humility could go lower. The affair was wound up with a

good deal of kissing, and tea, and there were no more suspicions for a long time.

"There had been peace, as I said, for long. But as, at the best of times, the Misses Brooke never gave us an invitation without going through the form of apologizing for the probable dullness of the entertainment, I was not surprised one morning to find myself invited to tea at Belle Vue Cottage for the following evening, on the strict condition that I should refuse the invitation if I felt disinclined to go. I had met the good ladies as we came out of church. There was Morning Prayer on Wednesdays and Fridays at one church in the town, and if the two little straw bonnets of the Misses Brooke had not been seen bending side by side at every service, the rest of the scanty congregation would have been as much astonished as if every one in the town who had time and opportunity for public worship had availed themselves of the privilege. On this day they had been there as usual, and when we turned up the street together, the invitation was given.

"'And could you induce your respected father to come with you, Mary dear?' added Miss Mary. 'You know our rooms are small, or we should be so glad to see Fatima. But we have a few friends coming, and she will understand.'

"'Only a few,' Miss Martha said, hastily. 'Don't make her think there's anything worth coming for, Mary. And mind, Mary dear, if you don't care to come, that you say so. There's no need for "excuses" with us. And you know exactly what our tea parties are.'

"'Now, Miss Martha,' I said, shaking my fist at her, 'I won't bear it!'

"'Well, my dear, you know it's true. And if you should have an invitation to the Lodge between now and to-morrow night, mind you throw us over. There's

no dancing and heavy supper at the cottage.'

" 'I'll eat a pound of beefsteak and have a private hornpipe to fortify me before I come, ma'am. And if the Lightfoots should ask me between now and then, I'll think about throwing over my oldest friends to oblige you !'

" 'You're very clever, my dear,' sighed Miss Martha, 'and it's easy to laugh at a stupid old woman like me.'

" Now this was rather unfair, for I had only taken to banter on these occasions because a serious treatment of the subject had failed. I made my peace, however, by grave and affectionate assurances that I wished to come, and would like to come ; and by adding a solemn promise that if I felt averse from it when the time came, I would stay at home.

" I was vexed to find symptoms of the old misunderstanding arising. The good ladies were evidently in a fidgety humour to-day ; and going home full of it, I poured out my vexation to Fatima.

" Fatima's composure was not so easily ruffled as mine. She was apt to sit in easy, graceful attitudes, looking very idle, but getting through a wonderful amount of exquisite needlework, and listening to my passing grievances without being much disturbed herself.

" 'I don't think I would worry myself,' she said, as she rapidly sorted the greens for a leaf in her embroidery. 'My idea is, that you will find the party more lively than usual. I have often noticed that when the old ladies are particularly full of apologies, something or somebody is expected.'

" 'I didn't want anything or anybody,' I said, dolefully ; 'but I wish they wouldn't take fancies, and I wish they wouldn't put one through such cross-examinations about nothing. As to the party, who could there be, but the old set ?'

" 'Nobody, I suppose. There'll be the Wilkinsons, of course ;' and Fatima marked the fact with an emphatic stitch. 'And Mr. Ward, I suppose, and Dr. Brown, and the Jones's girls, and——'

" 'Oh, the rooms wouldn't hold more !' I said.

" 'There's always room for one more—for a gentleman, at any rate ; and depend upon it, it is as I say.'

" Fatima was not so fond of the Misses Brooke as I was. She did not scruple to complain of the trouble it cost to maintain intimate relations with the excellent but touchy old ladies, and of the hot water about trifles into which one must perpetually fall.

" 'I hope I am pretty trustworthy,' she would say, 'and I am sure you are, Mary. And if we are not, let them drop our acquaintance. But they treat their friends as we used to treat our flowers at Reka Dom ! They are always taking them up to see how they are going on, and I like to vegetate in peace.'

" I could not have criticized my dear and respected old friends so freely ; but yet I knew that Fatima only spoke the truth.

" The subject was unexpectedly renewed at dinner.

" 'Mary,' said my father, 'is there any mystery connected with this tea-party at Miss Brooke's ?'

" Fatima gave me a mischievous glance.

" 'If there is, sir,' said I, 'I am not in the secret.'

" 'I met them in the town,' he went on, 'and they were good enough to invite me ; and as I must see Ward about some registers, I ventured to ask if he were to be of the party (thinking to save my old legs a walk to his place). The matter was simple enough, but Miss Martha seemed to fancy that I wanted to know who was going to be there. I fully explained my

real object, but either she did not hear or she did not believe me, I suppose, for she gave me a list of the expected company.'

"'I am sure she would have believed you, sir, if she had realized what you were saying,' I said. 'I know the sort of thing, but I think that they are generally so absorbed in their own efforts to do what they think you want, they have no spare attention for what you say.'

"'A very ingenious bit of special pleading, my dear, but you have not heard all. I had made my best bow and was just turning away, when Miss Martha, begging me to excuse her, asked with a good deal of mystery and agitation if *you* had commissioned me to find out who was to be at the party. I said I had not seen you since breakfast, but that I was quite able to assure her that if you had wished to find out anything on the subject, you would have gone direct to herself, with which I repeated my best bow in my best style, and escaped.'

"I was too much hurt to speak, and Fatima took up the conversation with my father.

"You will go, sir?' she said.

"Of course, my dear, if Mary wishes it. Besides, Ward *is* to be there. I learnt so much.'

"You learnt more, sir,' said Fatima, 'and please don't leave us to die of curiosity. Who is to be there, after all?'

"The Wilkinsons, and Miss Jones and her sister, and Ward, and an old friend of Miss Brooke's, a merchant.'

"But his name, please!' cried Fatima, for my father was retreating to his study.

"Smith—John Smith,' he answered laughing, and we were left alone.

"I was very much disposed to be injured and gloomy, but Fatima would not allow it. She was a very successful comforter. In the first place, she was thoroughly sympathetic; and in the second,

she had a great dislike to any disturbance of the general peace and harmony, and at last, her own easy, cheerful view of things became infectious where no very serious troubles were concerned.

"People must have their little weaknesses,' she said, 'and I am sure they haven't many failings.'

"This weakness is so unworthy of them,' I complained.

"All good people's weaknesses are unworthy of them, my dear. And the better they are, the more unworthy the weakness appears. Now, Mary, do be reasonable! You know at the bottom how true they are, and how fond of you. Pray allow them a few fidgety fancies, poor old dears. No doubt we shall be just as fidgety when we are as old. I'm sure I shall have as many fancies as hairs in my wig, and as to you, considering how little things weigh on your mind now—'

"Fatima's reasoning was not conclusive, but I think I came at last to believe that Miss Brooke's distrust was creditable to herself, and complimentary to me—so it certainly must have been convincing.

"And now,' she concluded, 'come upstairs and forget it. For I have got two new ideas on which I want your opinion. The first is a new stitch, in which I purpose to work some muslin dresses for us both. I thought of it in bed this morning. The second is a new plan for braiding your hair, which came into my head whilst father was reading aloud that speech to us last night. I had just fastened up the last plait when he laid down the paper.'

"You absurd Fatima!' I cried. 'How could you! And it was so interesting!'

"Don't look shocked,' said Fatima. 'I shall never be a politician. Of all studies, that of politics seems to me the most disturbing and uncomfortable. If some angel, or inspired person would tell me

which side was in the right, and whom to believe in, I could be a capital partisan. As it is, I don't worry myself with it; and last night when you were looking flushed and excited at the end of the speech, I was calmly happy——'

"'But, Fatima,' I broke in, 'you don't mean to say——'

"'If it had lasted five minutes longer,' said Fatima, 'I should have comfortably decided whether ferns or ivy would combine better with the loops.'

"'But Fatima! were you really not listening when——'

"'On the whole I decide for ivy,' said Fatima, and danced out of the room, I following and attempting one more remonstrance in the hall.

"'But Fatima!——'

"'With perhaps a suspicion of white chrysanthemums,' she added over the banisters.

"'Both the new ideas promised to be successful, and the following evening my hair was dressed in what Fatima now called the political plaits. From the first evening of my introduction into society she had established herself as my lady's maid. She took a generous delight in dressing me up, and was as clever as she was kind about it. This evening she seemed to have surpassed herself, as I judged by the admiring exclamations of our younger sister Phillis—a good little maid, who stood behind my chair with combs and pins in her hand as Fatima's aide-de-camp. Finally, the dexterous fingers interwove some sprays of ivy with the hair, and added white rosebuds for lack of chrysanthemums.

"'Perfect!' Fatima exclaimed, stepping backwards with gestures of admiration that were provokingly visible in the glass before which I sat. 'And to think that it should be wasted on an uninteresting tea-party! You will not wear your new muslin, of course?'

"'Indeed I shall,' I answered. 'You know I always make myself smart for the cottage.' Which was true, and my reason for it was this. I had once gone there to a quiet tea-party in a dress that was rather too smart for the occasion, and which looked doubly gay by contrast with the sombre costume of the elderly friends whom I met. I was feeling vexed with myself for an error in taste, when Miss Mary came up to me, and laying her hands affectionately on me, and smoothing my ribbons, thanked me for having come in such a pretty costume.

"'You come in, my dear,' she said, 'like a fresh nosegay after winter. You see we are old women, my love, and dress mostly in black, since dear James's death; and our friends are chiefly elderly and sombre-looking also. So it is a great treat to us to look at something young and pretty, and remember when we were girls, and took pains with such things ourselves.'

"'I was afraid I was too smart, Miss Mary,' I said.

"'To be sure it is a waste to wear your pretty things here,' Miss Mary added; 'but you might let us know sometimes when you are going to a grand party, and we will come and look at you.'

"'I was touched by the humble little lady's speech, and by the thought of how little one is apt to realize the fact that faded, fretful, trouble-worn people in middle life have been young, and remember their youth.

"'Thenceforward I made careful toilettes for the cottage, and this night was not an exception to the rule.

"'I was dressed early; my father was rather late, and we three girls had nearly an hour's chat before I had to go.

"'We began to discuss the merchant who was to vary the monotony of our small social circle. Phillis had heard that a

strange gentleman had arrived in the town this afternoon by the London stage. Fatima had an idea on the subject which she boldly stated. One of the Misses Brooke was going to be married—to this London merchant. We were just at an age when a real life romance is very attractive, and the town was not rich in romances—at least in our little society. So Fatima's idea found great favour with us, and, as she described it, seemed really probable. Here was an old friend, a friend of their youth, and probably a lover, turned up again, and the sisters were in a natural state of agitation. (It fully accounted for Miss Martha's suspicious sensitiveness yesterday, and I felt ashamed of having been aggrieved.) Doubtless the lovers had not been allowed to marry in early life because he was poor. They had been parted, but had remained faithful. He had made a fortune, like Dick Whittington, and now, a rich London merchant, had come back to take his old love home. Being an old friend, it was obviously a youthful attachment; and being a merchant, he must be very rich. This happy combination—universal in fiction, though not invariable in real life—was all that could be desired, and received strong confirmation from the fact of his coming from London; for in those days country girls seldom visited the metropolis, and we regarded the great city with awe, as the centre of all that was wealthy and wonderful. It was a charming story, and though we could not but wish that he had returned before Miss Martha took to a 'front' and spectacles, yet we pictured a comfortable domestic future for them; and Fatima was positive that 'worlds' might be done for the appearance of the future Mrs. Smith by more tasteful costume, and longed ardently to assume the direction of her toilette.

"I don't believe that she need wear a

front,' she pleaded. 'I dare say she has plenty of pretty grey hair underneath. Spectacles are intellectual, if properly worn: which, by-the-by, they need not be at meals when your husband is looking at you across the table; and as to caps——'

"But here my father knocked at the door, and I put on my cloak and hood, and went with him.

"The Misses Brooke received us affectionately, but I thought with some excitement, and a flush on Miss Martha's cheeks almost made me smile. I could not keep Fatima's fancy out of my head. Indeed, I was picturing my old friend in more cheerful and matronly costume presiding over the elegant belongings of a stout, well-to-do, comfortable Mr. John Smith, as I moved about in the little room, and exchanged mechanical smiles and greetings with the familiar guests. I had settled the sober couple by their fireside, and was hesitating between dove-colour and lavender-grey for the wedding silk, when Miss Martha herself disturbed me before I had decided the important question. I fancied a slight tremor in her voice as she said—

"Mr. John Smith.'

"I dropped a more formal curtsey than I had hitherto done, as was due to a stranger and a gentleman, and looked once at the object of my benevolent fancies, and then down again at my mittens. His head was just coming up from a low bow, and my instantaneous impression was, 'He wears a brown wig.' But in a moment more he was upright, and I saw that he did not. And—he certainly was not suitable in point of age. I took one more glance to make sure, and meeting his eyes, turned hastily, and plunged into conversation with my nearest neighbour, not noticing at the instant who it was. As I recovered from my momentary confusion, I became aware that I was talking to the rector's wife, and had advanced some



"I fancied a slight tremor in her voice as she said—'Mr. John Smith.' I dropped a more formal curtsy than I had hitherto done, as was due to a stranger and a gentleman, and looked once more at the object of my benevolent fancies, and then down again at my mittens." (P. 93.)

opinions on the subject of the weather which she was energetically disputing. I yielded gracefully, and went back to my thoughts. I hoped Miss Martha did not feel as I did the loss of that suitable, comfortable, middle-aged partner my fancy had provided for her. It did seem a pity that he had no existence. I thought that probably marriage was the happiest condition for most people, and felt inclined to discuss the question with the rector's wife, who had had about twenty-two years' exemplary experience of that state. Then I should like to have helped to choose the silk—

"At this point I was asked to play.

"I played some favourite things of Miss Brooke's and some of my own, Mr. Smith turning over the leaves of my music; and then he was asked to sing, and to my astonishment, prepared to accompany himself. Few English gentlemen (if any) could accompany their own songs on the pianoforte in my youth, Ida; most of them then had a wise idea that the pianoforte was an instrument 'only fit for women,' and would have as soon thought of trying to learn to play upon it as of studying the spinning-wheel. I do not know that I had ever heard one play except my father, who had lived much abroad. When Mr. Smith sat down at the instrument, I withdrew into a corner, where Miss Martha followed me as if to talk. But when he began, I think every one was silent.

"The song he sang is an old one now, Ida, but it was comparatively new then, and it so happened that very few of us had heard it before. It was 'Home, Sweet Home.' He had a charming voice, with a sweet pathetic ring about it, and his singing would have redeemed a song of far smaller merit, and of sentiment less common to all his hearers. As it was, our sympathies were taken by storm. The rector's wife sobbed audibly, but, I believe,

happily, with an oblique reference to the ten children she had left at home; and poor Miss Martha, behind me, touched away tear after tear with her thin fingertips, and finally took to her pocket-handkerchief, and thoughts of the dear dead brother, and the little house and garden, and I know not what earlier home still. As for me, I thought of Reka Dom.

"We had had many homes, but that was *the home par excellence*—the beloved of my father, the beloved of us all. And as the clear voice sang the refrain, which sounded in some of our ears like a tender cry of recall to past happiness,

'Home—Home—sweet, sweet Home!

I stroked Miss Martha's knee in silent sympathy, and saw Reka Dom before my eyes. The river seemed to flow with the melody. I swung to the tune between the elm-trees, with Walton and Cotton on my lap. What would Piscator have thought of it, had the milkmaid sung him this song? I roamed through the three lawns that were better to me than pleasures and palaces, and stood among the box-edged gardens. Then the refrain called me back again—

'Home—Home—sweet, sweet Home!'

I was almost glad that it ended before I, too, quite broke down.

"Everybody crowded round the singer with admiration of the song, and inquiries about it.

"'I heard it at a concert in town the other day,' he said, 'and it struck me as pretty, so I got a copy. It is from an English opera called "Clari," and seems the only pretty thing in it.'

"'Do you not like it?' Miss Jones asked me; I suppose because I had not spoken.

"'I think it is lovely,' I said, 'as far as I can judge; but it carries one away from criticism; I do not think I was

thinking of the music; I was thinking of Home.'

" 'Exactly.'

"It was not Miss Jones who said 'Exactly,' but the merchant, who was standing by her; and he said it, not in that indefinite tone of polite assent with which people commonly smile answers to each other's remarks at evening parties, but as if he understood the words from having thought the thought. We three fell into conversation about the song—about 'Clari'—about the opera—the theatre—about London; and then Dr. Brown, who had been educated in the great city, joined us, and finally he and Miss Jones took the London subject to themselves, and the merchant continued to talk to me. He was very pleasant company, chiefly from being so alive with intelligence that it was much less trouble to talk with him than with any one I had ever met, except my father. He required so much less than the average amount of explanation. It hardly seemed possible to use too few words for him to seize your meaning by both ends, so to speak; the root your idea sprang from, and the conclusion to which it tended.

"We talked of music—of singing—of the new song, and of the subject of it—home. And so of home-love, and patriotism, and the characters of nations in which the feeling seemed to predominate.

" 'Like everything else, it depends partly on circumstances, I suppose,' he said. 'I sometimes envy people who have only one home—the eldest son of a landed proprietor, for instance. I fancy I have as much home-love in me as most people, but it has been divided; I have had more homes than one.'

" 'I have had more homes than one,' I said; 'but with me I do not think it has been divided. At least, one of the homes has been so much dearer than the others.'

" 'Do you not think so because it is the latest, and your feelings about it are freshest?' he asked.

"I laughed. 'A bad guess. It is not my present home. This one was near a river.'

" 'Exactly.'

"This time the 'exactly' did not seem so appropriate as before, and I explained further.

" 'For one thing we were there when I was at an age when attachment to a place gets most deeply rooted, I think. As a mere child one enjoys and suffers like a kitten from hour to hour. But when one is just old enough to form associations and weave dreams, and yet is still a child—it is then, I fancy, that a home gets almost bound up with one's life.'

"He simply said 'Yes,' and I went on. Why, I can hardly tell, except that to talk on any subject beyond mere current chit-chat, and be understood, was a luxury we did not often taste at the tea-parties of the town.

" 'And yet I don't know if my theory will hold good, even in our case,' I went on, 'for my father was quite as much devoted to the place as we were, and fell in love with it quite as early. But the foreign name was the first attraction to him, I think.'

" 'It was abroad, then?' he asked.

"I explained, and again I can hardly tell why, but I went on talking till I had given him nearly as full a history of Reka Dom as I have given to you. For one thing he seemed amazingly interested in the recital, and drew out many particulars by questions; and then the song had filled my head with tender memories, and happy little details of old times, and it was always pleasant to prose about the River Home, as indeed, my child, it is pleasant still.

"We were laughing over some childish reminiscence, when Miss Martha tapped

me on the shoulder, and said rather louder than usual—

“‘Dear Mary, there are some engravings here, my love, I should like you to look at.’

“‘I felt rather astonished, for I knew every book and picture in the house as well as I knew my own, but I followed her to a table, when she added in a fluttering whisper—

“‘You’ll excuse my interrupting you, my love, I’m sure; but it was becoming quite particular.’

“‘I blushed redder than the crimson silk binding of the ‘Keepsake’ before me. I wished I could honestly have misunderstood Miss Martha’s meaning. But I could not. Had I indeed talked too much and too long to a gentleman and a stranger? (It startled me to reflect how rapidly we had passed that stage of civil commonplace which was the normal condition of my intercourse with the gentlemen of the town.) I was certainly innocent of any intentional transgression of those bounds of reticence and decorum which are a young lady’s best friends, but as to the length of my conversation with the merchant I felt quite uncertain and unspeakably alarmed.

“‘I was indulging a few hasty and dismal reflections when Miss Martha continued—

“‘When I was young, dear Mary, I remember a valuable piece of advice that was given me by my excellent friend and schoolmistress, Miss Peckham, “If you are only slightly acquainted with a gentleman, talk of indifferent matters. If you wish to be friendly but not conspicuous, talk of *his* affairs; but only if you mean to be very intimate, speak of yourself;”’ and adding, ‘I’m sure you’ll forgive me, my love,’ Miss Martha fluttered from the table.

“At the moment I was feeling provoked both with her and with myself, and did not

feel so sure about the forgiveness as she professed to be; but of one thing I felt perfectly certain. Nothing but sheer necessity should induce me to speak another syllable to the London merchant.

“Circumstances did not altogether favour my resolution. I scrupulously avoided so much as a look at Mr. Smith, though in some mysterious way I became conscious that he and my father were having a long *tête-à-tête* conversation in a corner. I devoted myself exclusively to the rector’s wife till supper, and then I carefully chose the opposite side of the table to that to which the merchant seemed to be going. But when I was fairly seated, for some reason he gave up his place to someone else, and when it was impossible for me to change my seat, he took the one next to it. It was provoking, but I steadily resisted his attempts to talk, and kept my face as much averted as possible. Once or twice he helped me to something on the table, but I barely thanked him, and never lifted my eyes to his face. I could not, however, avoid seeing the hand that helped me, and idly noticing a ring that I had remarked before, when he was playing. It was a fine blue stone, a lapis lazuli, curiously and artistically set. ‘Rich merchants can afford such baubles!’ I thought. It was very tasteful, however, and did not look like English work. There was something engraved upon it, which did not look like English either. Was it Greek? I glanced at it with some curiosity, for it reminded me of—but that was nonsense, a fancy that came because the subject was in my mind. At this moment the hand and ring were moved close to me and I looked again.

“It was not a fancy. There was no mistaking the inscription this time. I had learnt it too thoroughly—written it too often—loved it too well—it was *Reka Dom*.

"For a moment I sat in blind astonishment. Then the truth suddenly flashed upon me. The merchant's name was the name of our predecessors at Reka Dom. True, it was such a common one that I had met more than one family of Smiths since then without dreaming of any connection between them and the River House. And yet of course it was there that the Misses Brooke had known him. Before our time. Which could he be? He was too young to be the father, and there was no John among the little Russians—unless—yes, it was the English version of one of the Russian names—and this was Ivan.

"It crowned my misfortunes. What would Miss Martha say if she knew what had been the subject of our conversation? Would that that excellent rule which had been the guide of her young ladyhood had curtailed the conversational propensities of mine! I thought of the three degrees of intimacy with a shudder. Why had we not been satisfied with discussing the merits of the song?

"We had gone on to talk of him and his homes, and, as if that were not enough, had proceeded further to me and mine. I got red as I sat listening to some civil chat from Mr. Ward the curate (eminently in the most innocent stage of the first degree), and trying to recall what we had not spoken of in connection with that Home which had been so beloved of both of us, and that Ivan whose lilies I had tended for years.

"I grew nearly frantic as I thought that he must think that I had known who he was, and wildly indignant with the fancy for small mysteries which had kept Miss Brooke from telling us whom we were going to meet.

"At last the evening came to an end. I was cloaking myself in the hall when the merchant came up and offered his help,

which I declined. But he did not go, and stood so that I could not help seeing a distressed look in his eyes, and the nervous way in which he was turning the blue ring upon his finger.

"'I have so wanted to speak to you again,' he said, 'I wanted to say——'

"But at this moment I caught Miss Martha's eye in the parlour doorway, and dropping a hasty curtsy, I ran to my father.

"'A very nice young fellow,' my father observed, as I took his arm outside: 'a superior, sensible, well-informed gentleman, such as you don't meet with every day.'

"I felt quite unequal to answering the remark, and he went on:

"'What funny little ways your old friends have, my dear, to be sure. Considering how few strangers come to the place, it would have been natural for them to tell us all about the one they asked us to meet; and as they had known both him and us, as tenants of Reka Dom, it was doubly natural that they should speak of him to us, and of us to him. But he told me that we were just the people present of whom he had not heard a word. He seems both fond of them and to appreciate their little oddities. He told me he remembers, as a boy, that they never would call him Ivan, which is as much his name as any by which a man was ever baptized. They thought it might give him a tendency to affectation to bear so singular a name in England. They always called him John, and keep up the discipline still. When he arrived yesterday they expressed themselves highly satisfied with the general improvement in him, and he said he could hardly help laughing as Miss Martha added, 'And you seem to have quite shaken off that little habit of affectation which—you'll excuse me, dear John—you had as a boy.' He says that,

to the best of his belief, his only approach to affectation consisted in his being rather absent and ungainly, and in a strong aversion from Mr. Brooke.'

"'Did the old gentleman wear that frightful shade in his time?' I asked.

"'Not always,' he says, 'but he looked worse without it. He told me a good deal about him that I had never heard. He remembered hearing it spoken of as a boy. It appears that the brother was very wild and extravagant in his youth; drank, too, I fancy, and gave his poor sisters a world of trouble, after breaking the heart of the widowed mother who had spoiled him. When she died the sisters lived together, and never faltered in their efforts to save him—never shut their doors against him when he would return—and paid his debts over and over again. He spent all his own fortune, and most of theirs, besides being the means of breaking off comfortable marriages for both. Mr. Smith thinks that a long illness checked his career, and eventually he reformed."

"'I hope he was grateful to his poor sisters,' I said.

"'One naturally thinks that he must have been so, but Smith's remark was very just. He said, "I fancy he was both penitent and grateful as far as he was able, but I believe he had been too long accustomed to their unqualified self-sacrifice to feel it very sensitively!" And I believe he is right. Such men not seldom reform in conduct if they live long enough, but few eyes that have been blinded by years of selfishness are opened to see clearly in this world.'

"'It ought to make one very tender with the good ladies' little weaknesses,' I said, self-reproachfully; and I walked home in a more peaceful state of mind. I forgave poor Miss Martha, also I was secretly satisfied that my father had found

the merchant's conversation attractive. It seemed to give me some excuse for my breach of Miss Peckham's golden rule. Moreover, little troubles and offences which seemed mountains at Bellevue Cottage were apt to dwindle into very surmountable molehills with my larger-minded parents. I was comparatively at ease again. My father had evidently seen nothing unusual in my conduct, so I hoped that it had not been conspicuous. Possibly I might never meet Mr. Smith any more. I rather hoped not. Life is long, and the world wide, and it is sometimes possible to lose sight of people with whom one has disagreeable associations. And then it was a wholesome lesson for the future.

"'And what was the old gentleman like?' was Fatima's first question, when I came upstairs. I had just been talking of Mr. Brooke, and no other old gentleman occurred to my memory at that moment.

"'What old gentleman?' I asked dreamily.

"'Miss Martha's old gentleman, the merchant—wasn't he there, after all?'

"I blushed at my stupidity, and at a certain feeling of guiltiness in connection with the person alluded to.

"'Oh, yes, he was there,' I answered; 'but he is not an old gentleman.'

"'What is he, then?' Fatima asked curiously.

"It is undoubtedly a luxury to be the bearer of a piece of startling intelligence, and it is well not to spoil the enjoyment of it by over haste. I finished unsnapping my necklace, and said, very deliberately—

"'He is one of the little Russians.'

"Fatima's wit jumped more quickly than mine had done. It was she who added—

"'Then he is Ivan.'

"My hopes in reference to Mr. Smith

were disappointed. I had not seen the last of him. My mother was at this time from home, and I was housekeeper in her absence. It was on the morning following the Bellevue tea-party that my father said to me—

“ ‘Mr. Smith is coming up to refer to a book of mine to-day, my dear ; and I asked him to stay to dinner. I suppose it will be convenient ?’

“ I said, ‘ Certainly, sir.’

“ I could plead no domestic inconvenience ; but I thought that Mr. Smith might have gone quietly back to London by the early coach, and spared me the agitation which the prospect of seeing him again undoubtedly excited. He came, however. It was the first visit, but by no means the last ; and he lingered in the town, greatly to my father’s satisfaction (who had taken a strong fancy for him), but not, apparently, to that of the Misses Brooke.

“ As I afterwards found the clue to the somewhat strange conduct of our old friends at this time, I may as well briefly state how it was.

“ When the merchant first announced to them his proposed business visit to the town, and his intention of calling on them, the good ladies (in their affection for me, and having a high opinion of him) planned a kindly little romance of which he and I were to be the hero and heroine, and which was to end in our happy marriage. With this view they arranged for our meeting at the tea-party, and avoided all mention of each to the other, that we might meet in the (so to speak) incidental way characteristic of real love stories. With that suspiciousness of people in general, and of young people in particular, which haunted Miss Martha, she attributed my ready acceptance of the invitation to my having heard of Mr. Smith’s arrival, and to the unusual attraction of an eligible gentleman at the tea-party. Little did she

guess the benevolent plans which on my part I had formed for her, and which the merchant’s youthful appearance had dashed to the ground.

“ It is sometimes the case, my dear Ida, that people who make these kind plans for their friends, become dissatisfied with the success of their arrangements if they themselves cease to be the good genii of the plot. If, that is, matters seem likely to fall out as they wish, but without their assistance. It was so with the Misses Brooke, and especially with Miss Martha. Fully aware of the end which she in her own mind proposed to our acquaintance, my long conversation with the merchant struck her as an indelicate readiness to accept attentions which had matrimony in her perspective, and which she had designed to be the gradual result of sundry well-chaperoned and studiously incidental interviews at the Cottage. And when, so far from thankfully accepting these incidental meetings, the merchant took upon himself to become an almost daily visitor at our house, and delayed his return to London far beyond the time proposed for his departure, the good lady’s view underwent a decided change. It was ‘ a pity ’ that a young man like John Smith should neglect his business. It was also ‘ a pity ’ that dear Mary’s mother was not at home. And when I took occasion casually to allude to the fact that Mr. Smith’s visits were paid to my father, and (with the exception of an occasional meal) were passed in the study amongst German pamphlets, my statement was met by kind, incredulous smiles, and supplemented with general and somewhat irritating observations on the proper line of conduct for young ladies at certain crises of life. Nothing could be kinder than Miss Martha’s intentions, and her advice might have been a still greater kindness if she would have spoken straightforwardly, and believed what I said. As

it was, I left off going to Bellevue Cottage, and ardently wished that the merchant would go back to his merchandise, and leave our quiet little town to its own dull peace.

"Sometimes I thought of the full-grown man whose intelligent face, and the faintly foreign accent of whose voice were now familiar in our home,—the busy merchant, the polite and agreeable gentleman. And then I thought of the Ivan I seemed to have known so much better so long ago! The pale boy wandering by the water—reading in the swing—dead by that other river—buried beneath the lilies. Oh! why had he lived to come back in this new form to trouble me?

"One day he came to my father as usual, and I took the opportunity to call on my old friends. I felt ashamed of having neglected them, and as I knew that Mr. Smith was at our house, I could not be suspected of having hoped to meet him at theirs. But I called at an unfortunate moment. Miss Martha had just made up her mind that in the absence of my mother, and the absentness of my father, it was the duty of old friends like herself to give me a little friendly counsel. As she took a great deal of credit to herself for being 'quite candid, my dear,' and quietly but persistently refused to give me credit for the same virtue, I was too much irritated to appreciate the kindness which led her to undertake the task of interference in so delicate a matter; and found her remarks far from palatable. In the midst of them, the merchant was announced.

"If I could have looked innocent it would have done me no good. As it was, I believe I looked very guilty. After sitting for a few minutes longer I got up to go, when to my horror the merchant rose also. The old ladies made no effort to detain him, but Miss Martha's face spoke volumes

as we left the house. Half mad with vexation, I could hardly help asking him why he was stupid enough to come away just at the moment I had chosen for leaving; but he forestalled the inquiry by a voluntary explanation. He wished to speak to me. He had something to say.

"When he had said it, and had asked me to marry him, my cup was full. I refused him with a vehemence which must have surprised him, modest as he was, and rushed wildly home.

"For the next few days I led a life of anything but comfort. First as to Ivan. My impetuous refusal did not satisfy him, and he wrote me a letter over which I shed bitter tears of indescribable feeling.

"Then as to my father. The whole affair took him by surprise. He was astonished, and very much put out, especially as my mother was away. So far from its having been, as with the Misses Brooke, the first thing to occur to him, he repeatedly and emphatically declared that it was the very last thing he should have expected. He could neither imagine what had made the merchant think of proposing to me, nor what had made me so ready to refuse him. Then they were in the very middle of a crabbed pamphlet, in which Ivan's superior knowledge of German had been invaluable. It was most inconvenient.

"'Why didn't I like poor Ivan?'

"Ah, my child, did I not like him!

"Then why was I so cross to him?'

"Indeed, Ida, I think the old ladies' 'ways' were chiefly to blame for this. Their well-meant but disastrous ways of making you feel that you were doing wrong, or in the wrong, over matters the most straightforward and natural. But I was safe under the wing of my mother, before I saw Ivan again; and—many as were the years he and I were permitted to spend together—I think I may truthfully

say that I never was cross to him any more.

"What did he say in that letter that made me cry?"

"He asked to be allowed to make himself better known to me, before I sent him quite away. And this developed an ingenious notion in my father's brain, that no better opportunity could, from every point of view, be found for this, than that I should be allowed to sit with them in the study, whilst he and Ivan went on with the German pamphlet.

"The next call I paid at Bellevue Cottage was to announce my engagement, and I had some doubt of the reception my news might meet with. But I had no kinder or more loving congratulations than those of the two sisters. Small allusion was made to by-gones. But when Miss Martha murmured in my ear—

"You'll forgive my little fussiness and over-anxiety, dear Mary. One would be glad to guard one's young friends from some of the difficulties and disappointments one has known oneself——' I thought of the past life of the sisters, and returned her kiss with tenderness. Doubtless she had feared that the merchant might be trifling with my feelings, and that a thousand other ills might happen when the little love affair was no longer under her careful management. But all ending well, was well; and not even the Bellevue cats were more petted by the old ladies than we two were in our brief and sunny betrothal.

"Sunny, although for the most part it was winter time. When we would sit by the fireside in the privileged idleness of lovers, sometimes at home, sometimes in the cottage parlour; and Ivan would tell of the Russian Reka Dom, and of all the winter beauties and pleasures of that other river which was for months a frozen highway, with gay sleighs flying, jingling over the snow roads, and peasants wrapped in

sheepskin crossing from the country to market in the town. How dogs and children rolled together in snow so dry from intense cold that it hardly wet them more than sand. And how the river closed, and when it opened, with all the local traditions connected with these events; and of the stratagems resorted to to keep Jack Frost out of the houses, and of the stores laid up against the siege of the Winter King.

"But through the most interesting of his narratives Fatima's hands were never idle. She seemed to have concentrated all her love for me into those beautiful taper fingers, which laboured ceaselessly in exquisite needlework on my wedding clothes.

"And when the lilies of the valley were next in blossom, Ivan and I were married.

"The blue-stoned ring was cut down to fit my finger, and was, by my desire, my betrothal ring, and I gave Ivan another instead of it. Inside his was engraven the inscription we had cut upon his tombstone at Reka Dom,—

"TO IVAN."

It was a long story, and Nurse had been waiting some little time in the old lady's kitchen when it came to an end.

"And is Ivan ——?" Ida hesitatingly began.

"Dead. Many years since, my child," said the little old lady; "you need not be afraid to speak of him, my dear. All that is past. We used to hope that we should neither of us long outlive the other, but God willed it otherwise. It was very bitter at first, but it is different now. The days and hours that once seemed to widen our separation are now fast bringing us together again."

"Was he about papa's age when he died?" Ida gently asked.

"He was older than your father can have been, my love, I think. He was a more than middle-aged man. He died of fever.



—“this developed an ingenious notion in my father's brain, that no better opportunity could, from every point of view, be found for this, than that I should be allowed to sit with them in the study, whilst he and Ivan went on with the German pamphlet.” (P. 102.)

It was in London, but in his delirium he fancied that the river was running by the windows, and when I bathed his head he believed that the cooling drops were from the waters of his old home."

"Didn't he know you?" Ida asked, with sudden sympathy.

"He knew the touch of my hands always, my dear. It was my greatest comfort. That, and the short time of perfect reason before he sank to rest. We had been married thirty years, and I had worn my silver wedding-ring with even more pride than the golden one. There have been lilies on the grave of the true Ivan for half that time, and will be, perhaps, for yet a little while, till I also am laid beneath them.

"So ends the story, my dear," the little old lady added, after a pause.

"I should like to know what became of the old landlord, please," Ida said.

"If you will ask an old woman like me the further history of the people she knew in her youth," said Mrs. Overthway, smiling, "you must expect to hear of deaths. Of course he died many a long year since. We became very intimate with him whilst we were his tenants, and, I believe, cheered the close of his life. He and my father were fast friends, but it was to my mother that he became especially devoted. He said she was an exception to her sex, which from his point of view was a high compliment. He had unbounded confidence in her judgment, and, under her influence, eventually modified many of his peculiar habits. She persuaded him to allot a very moderate sum to house-keeping expenses, and to indulge in the economical luxury of a trustworthy servant. He consented to take into use a good suit of clothes which he possessed, and in these the old man was wont at last to accompany us to church, and to eat his Sunday dinner with us afterwards. I do not think

he was an illiberal man at heart, but he had been very poor in his youth (—"So poor, ma'am," he said one day to my mother, "that I could not live with honour and decency in the estate of a gentleman. I did not live. I starved—and bought books,")—and he seemed unable to shake off the pinching necessity of years. A wealthy uncle who had refused to help him whilst he lived, bequeathed all his money to him when he died. But when late in life the nephew became rich, habits of parsimony were a second nature, and seemed to have grown chronic and exaggerated under the novel anxieties of wealth. He still 'starved—and bought books.' During the last years of his life he consulted my mother (and, I fancy, other people also) on the merits of various public charities in the place and elsewhere; so that we were not astonished after his death to learn from his will that he had divided a large part of his fortune amongst charitable institutions. With the exception of a few trifling legacies to friends, the rest of his money was divided in equal and moderate bequests to relatives. He left some valuable books to my father, and the bulk of his library to the city where he was born."

"Was your mother with him when he died?" Ida asked.

"She was, my dear. But, sadly enough, only at the very last. We were at the seaside when he was seized by his last illness, and no one told us, for indeed it is probable that few people knew. At last a letter from the servant announced that he was dying, and had been most anxious to see my mother, and she hastened home. The servant seemed relieved by her arrival, for the old gentleman was not altogether an easy patient to nurse. He laughed at the doctor, she said, and wouldn't touch a drop of his medicine, but otherwise was as patient as a sick gentleman could be,

and sat reading his Bible all the day long. It was on the bed when my mother found him, but his eyes were dimming fast. He held out his hands to my mother, and as she bent over him said something of which she could only catch three words—'the true riches.' He never spoke again."

"Poor man!" said Ida: "I think he was very nice. What became of his cat?"

"Dead—dead—dead!" said the little old lady; "Ida, my child, I will answer no more questions."

"One more, please," said Ida! "where is that dear, dear Fatima?"

"No, my child; no! Nothing more about her. Dear, dear Fatima, indeed! And yet I will just tell you that she married, and that her husband (older even than I am, and very deaf) is living still. He and I are very fond of each other, though, having been a handsome man, he is sensitive about his personal appearance, and will not use a trumpet, which I consider weak. But we get on very well. He smells my flowers, and smiles and nods to me, and says something in a voice so low that I can't hear it; and I stick a posy in his button-hole, and smile and nod to him, and say something in a voice so loud that *he* can't hear it; and so we go on. One day in each year we always spend together, and go to church. The first of November."

"That is——?" said Ida.

"The Feast of All Saints, my child."

"Won't you tell me any more?" Ida asked.

"No, my dear. Not now, at any rate. Remember I am old, and have outlived almost all of those I loved in my youth. It is right and natural that death should be sad in your eyes, my child, and I will not make a tragedy of the story of Reka Dom."

"Then your real name," said Ida, as

she gave the old lady a farewell kiss, "is——"

"Mary Smith, my dear," said Mrs. Overthway.

Next morning the little old lady went to church as usual, and Ida was at the window when she returned. When the child had seen her old friend into the house she still kept her place, for the postman was coming down the street, and it was amusing to watch him from door to door, and to see how large a bundle of letters he delivered at each. At Mrs. Overthway's he delivered one, a big one, and an odd curiosity about this letter took possession of Ida. She wished she knew what it was about, and from whom it came, though, on the face of it, it was not likely she would be much the wiser if she did. She was still at the window when the door of the opposite house was opened, and the little old lady came hurriedly out. She had only her cap upon her head, and she held an open letter in her hand; *the* letter, it was evident. When she reached the little green gate she seemed to recollect herself, and, putting her hand to her head, went back into the house. Ida waited anxiously to see if she would come out again, and presently she appeared, this time in her bonnet, but still with the letter in her hand. She crossed the street, and seemed to be coming to the house. Then the bell rang, and in she came. Ida's curiosity became intense, and was not lessened by the fact that the little old lady did not come to her, but stayed below talking with some one. The old gentleman had not returned, so it must be Nurse.

At last the conversation came to an end, and Mrs. Overthway came upstairs.

She kissed Ida very tenderly, and inquired after her health; but though she seemed more affectionate than usual, Ida

felt persuaded that something was the matter. She drew a chair to the fire, and the old lady sat down, saying—

"May I stay a little with you, my dear?"

"Oh, thank you!" said Ida, and put a footstool for the old lady's feet.

Mrs. Overthaway stroked her head tenderly for some time in silence, and then said, in a gentle voice—

"I have something to tell you, my dear."

"Another story?" Ida asked. "Oh, thank you, if it is another story."

The old lady was silent, but at last she said, as if to herself—

"Perhaps best so," and added: "Yes, my love, I will tell you a story."

Ida thanked her warmly, and another pause ensued.

"I hardly know where to begin, or what to tell you of this story," said the little old lady at last, seeming to falter for the first time in her Scharazad-like powers of narration.

"Let it be about a Home, please; if you can," said Ida.

"A home!" said the old lady, and strangely enough, she seemed more agitated than when she had spoken of Reka Dom—"It should have begun with a broken home, but it shall not. It should end with a united home, God willing. A home! I must begin with a far-away one, a strange one, on the summit of high cliffs, the home of fearless, powerful creatures, white-winged like angels."

"It's a fairy tale," said Ida.

"No, my child, it is true."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," Ida said.

"It shall be a tale of that description if you like," said the old lady, after a pause, "but, as I said, the main incidents are true."

"And the white-winged creatures?" Ida asked. "Were they fairies?"

"No, my love; birds. But if to see

snowy albatrosses with their huge white wings wheeling in circles about a vessel sailing in mid ocean be anything like what I have read of and heard described, fairyland could hardly show anything more beautiful and impressive."

"Do they fly near ships then?" Ida asked.

"Yes, my child. I remember my husband describing them to me as he had once seen them in southern seas. He said that when he saw them, great, white, and majestic, holding no intercourse with anyone on board the ship, and yet spreading their wings above her day and night for hundreds of miles over the ocean, with folded feet, the huge white pinions, except for an occasional flap, outstretched in steady sail, never resting, and seemingly never weary, they looked like guardian angels keeping watch over the crew."

"I wonder if they are sorry for the ships that go down?" said Ida, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Overthaway took her hand.

"Do you think it unkind in me to talk of ships, my love?" she asked.

"No, no, no!" Ida exclaimed, "I don't mind *your* talking about it. I wish I could talk to the birds that saw Papa's ship go down, if there were any, and ask them how it was, and if he minded it much, and if he remembered me. I used to wish I had been with him, and one night I dreamed about it; but when the water touched me, I was frightened, and screamed, and woke; and then I was glad I hadn't been there, for perhaps he wouldn't have loved me so much if he had seen that I wasn't brave."

The little old lady kissed her tenderly.

"And now the story, please," said Ida, after a pause.

And Mrs. Overthaway began the following story.

KERGUELEN'S LAND.

“ ‘Down in the deep, with freight and crew,
Past any help she lies,
And never a bale has come to shore
Of all thy merchandise.’

‘For cloth o’ gold and comely frieze,’
Winstanley said, and sigh’d.
‘For velvet coif, or costly coat,
They fathoms deep may bide.

‘O thou, brave skipper, blithe and kind,
O mariners bold and true,
Sorry at heart, right sorry am I,
A-thinking of yours and you.’”

“WINSTANLEY” (JEAN INGELow).

KERGUELEN'S LAND.

FATHER Albatross had been out all day, and was come home to the island which gives its name to this story. He had only taken a short flight, for his wife was hatching an egg, and he kept comparatively near the island where her nest was situated. There was only one egg, but parental affection is not influenced by numbers. There is always love enough for the largest family, and everything that could be desired in an only child, and Mother Albatross was as proud as if she had been a hen sitting on a dozen.

"The Father Albatross was very considerate. Not only did he deny himself those long flights which he and his mate had before so greatly enjoyed, but he generally contrived to bring back from his shorter trips some bits of news for her amusement. Their island home lay far out of the common track of ships, but sometimes he sighted a distant vessel, and he generally found something to tell of birds or fish, whales or waterspouts, icebergs or storms. When there was no news he discussed the winds and waves, as we talk of the weather and the crops.

"Bits of news, like misfortunes, are apt to come together. The very day on which the egg hatched, Father Albatross returned from his morning flight so full of what he had seen, that he hardly paid any attention to his mate's announcement of the addition to his family.

"'Could you leave the nest for a quarter of an hour, my dear?' he asked.

"'Certainly not,' said Mother Albatross; 'as I have told you, the egg is hatched at last.'

"'These things always happen at the least convenient moments,' said the father bird. 'There's a ship within a mere wing-stretch, untold miles out of her course, and going down. I came away just as she was sinking, that you might have a chance of seeing her. It is a horrible sight.'

"'It must be terrible to witness,' she replied, 'and I would give worlds to see it; but a mother's first duty is the nest, and it is quite impossible for me to move. At the same time I beg that you will return, and see whatever there is to be seen.'

"'It is not worth while,' he answered; 'there was not a moment to lose, and by this time she must be at the bottom with all belonging to her.'

"'Could none of them fly away?' the Mother Albatross asked.

"'No men have wings,' replied her mate, 'nor, for that matter, fins or scales either. They are very curious creatures. The fancy they have for wandering about between sea and sky, when Nature has not enabled them to support themselves in either, is truly wonderful. Go where you will over the ocean you meet men, as you meet fish and birds. Then if anything disables these ships that they contrive to go about in, down they go, and as the men can neither float nor fly, they sink to the bottom like so many stones.'

"'Were there many on the ship you saw?' the mother bird asked.

"'More than one likes to see drowned in a batch,' said Father Albatross; 'and I feel most sorry for the captain. He was a

fine fellow, with bright eyes and dark curly plumage, and would have been a handsome creature if he had had wings. He was going about giving orders with desperate and vain composure, and wherever he went there went with him a large dog with dark bright curls like his own. I have seen the ship before, and I know the dog. His name is Carlo. He is the captain's property, and the ship's pet. Usually he is very quiet, and sometimes, when it blows, he is ill; but as a rule he lay on the deck, blinking with the most self-sufficient air you can imagine. However, to-day, from the moment that danger was imminent, he seemed to be aware of it, and to have only one idea on the subject, to keep close to his master. He got in front of him as he moved about, sat down at his feet when he stood still, jumped on him when he shouted his orders, and licked his hands when he seized the ropes. In fact, he was most troublesome. But what can you expect of a creature that requires four legs to go about with, and can't rise above the earth even with these, and doesn't move as many yards in a day as I go miles in an hour? He *can* swim, but only for a certain length of time. However, he is probably quiet enough now; and perhaps some lucky chance has rolled him to his master's feet below the sea.

"Have men no contrivance for escaping on these occasions?" the mother bird inquired.

"They have boats, into which they go when the ship will hold them no longer. It is much as if you should put out the little one to fly in a storm, against which your own wings failed."

"Perhaps the boats are in good order when the ship is not," said Mother Albatross, who had a practical gift. "Were there boats to this one?"

"There were. I saw one lowered, and

quickly filled with men, eager to snatch this last chance of life."

"Was the captain in it?" she asked.

"No. He stayed on the ship and gave orders. The dog stayed with him. Another boat was lowered and filled just as the ship went down."

"Was the captain in it?"

"Again, no. He stayed with the vessel and some others with him. They were just sinking as I came for you. With the last glance I gave I saw the captain standing quite still near the wheel. The dog was sitting on his feet. They were both looking in one direction—away over the sea. But why should you distress yourself? It is all over long since. Think of the little one, and let us be thankful that we belong to a superior race. We might have been born without wings, like poor sailors."

"I cannot help grieving for the captain," said Mother Albatross. "When you spoke of his bright eyes and handsome plumage I thought of you; and how should I feel if you were to die? I wish he had gone in the boats."

"I doubt if he would have fared better, said the father bird. 'The second boat must have been swamped in the sinking of the ship; and it is far from probable that the other will get to land.'

"Nevertheless, I hope you will fly in that direction to-morrow," she said, "and bring me word whether there are any traces of the catastrophe."

"The following morning Father Albatross set forth as he was desired. The ship had foundered quite near to the other side of the island, and including a little excursion to see if the first boat were still above water, he expected to be back very shortly."

"He returned even sooner than the Mother Albatross had hoped, and descended to the side of their nest with as much agitation as his majestic form was capable of displaying."

"'Wonders will never cease!' he exclaimed. 'What do you think are on the island?'

"'I couldn't guess if I were to try from now till next hatching season,' said his mate; 'and I beg you will not keep me in suspense. I am not equal to the slightest trial of the nerves. It is quite enough to be a mother.'

"'The captain and one or two more men are here,' said the Albatross. 'What do you think of that? You will be able to see him for yourself, and to show the youngster what men are like into the bargain. It's very strange how they have escaped; and that lazy, self-sufficient dog is with them.'

"'I cannot possibly leave our young one at present,' said the Mother Albatross, 'and he certainly cannot get so far. It will be very provoking if the men leave the island before I can see them.'

"'There is not much fear of that,' her mate answered. 'A lucky wave has brought them to shore, but it will take a good many lucky waves to bring a ship to carry them home.'

"'Father Albatross was right; but his mate saw the strangers sooner than she expected. Her nest, though built on the ground, was on the highest point of the island, and to this the shipwrecked men soon made their way; and there the Mother Albatross had ample chance of seeing the bright eyes of the captain as they scanned the horizon line with keen anxiety. Presently they fell upon the bird herself.'

"'What splendid creatures they are!' he said to his companion; 'and so grandly fearless. I was never on one of these islands where they breed before. What a pity it is that they cannot understand one! That fellow there, who is just stretching his noble wings, might take a message and bring us help.'

"'He is a fine creature,' said the Mother Albatross, peeping at the captain from her nest; 'that is, he would be if he had wings, and could speak properly, instead of making that unmusical jabbering like a monkey.'

"'I would give a good deal to one of them for a report of the first boat,' the captain went on. 'Heaven knows I would be content to die here if I could know that it was safe. But I'm afraid—I'm afraid; oh! dear!'

"'And the captain paced up and down, the other consoling him.'

"'He doesn't seem as tame as one might expect,' said the Mother Albatross, 'he's so restless. But possibly he is hungry.'

"'Truly it was a great amusement for the mother bird to watch the strangers from her nest, and to question her mate on their peculiarities.'

"'What is he doing now?' she asked on one occasion, when the captain was reading a paper which he had taken from the note-book in his pocket.

"'That is a letter,' said the Father Albatross. 'And from the look of it I gather that, like ourselves, he has got a young one somewhere, wherever his nest may be.'

"'How do you gather that?' his mate inquired.

"'Because the writing is so large,' answered the Father Albatross. 'It is one of the peculiarities of these creatures that the smaller they are the larger they write. That letter is from a young one; probably his own.'

"'Very remarkable indeed,' said the Mother Albatross. 'And what is he doing now?'

"'Now he is writing himself,' said her mate; 'and if you observe you will see my statement confirmed. See how much smaller he writes!'

"The captain had indeed torn a sheet from his note-book, and was busy scribbling upon his knees. Whether the sight of papers was a familiar memory with Carlo, or whether he was merely moved by one of those doggish impulses we so little understand, it is impossible to say; but when the captain began to write, Carlo began to wag his tail, and he wagged it without pause or weariness till the captain had finished, keeping his nearest eye half open, and fixed upon the paper and the captain's moving hand. Once he sat up on his haunches and put his nose on the letter.

"That is right, old fellow, kiss it," said the captain. "I am just telling her about you. Heaven send she may ever read it, poor child!"

"At this Carlo became so frantic, and so persistent in pushing his nose on to the paper, that the captain was fain to pocket his writing materials, and have a game at play with the 'ship's dog,' in which the latter condescendingly joined for a few minutes, and then lay down as before, shutting his eyes with an air which seemed to imply—

"I see, poor fellow, you don't understand me."

"The hardships endured by this small remnant of the ship's company were not very great. They managed to live. The weather was fine, and they did not at first trouble themselves about any permanent shelter. Perhaps, too, in spite of their seaman's knowledge of the position they were in, some dim hope of a ship out of her course as they had been, picking them off, buoyed them up with the fancy that 'it was not worth while.' But no ship appeared; and they built themselves a hut near the albatross's nest, and began to talk of other seasons, and provision for the future. They kept a look-out by turns through the daylight, and by night when

the moon and stars made the distance visible. Every morning the sun rising above the sea met the captain's keen eyes scanning the horizon, and every evening that closed a day's fruitless watch, the sun going down saw the captain's brown hands clasped together as he said, 'God's will be done!'

"So days became weeks, and weeks ripened into months, and Carlo became used to his new home, and happy in it, and kept watch over his master, and took his ease as usual. But the men's appearance changed, and their clothes began to look shabby. In the first place they were wearing out, and secondly they seemed—as we say—to be 'getting too large' for them, and to hang loosely and untidily upon their gaunt frames. The captain's eyes looked larger and sadder, and his voice grew hollow at sunset, and threads of white began to show among his dark curls, and increased in number day by day.

"His plumage will be as white as your own very soon," said the Mother Albatross. "I suppose it's the climate that does it."

"He is getting older," said her mate: "men, like ourselves, get white as they get old."

"But he has been here so short a time," said Mother Albatross.

"He is so much the older, however," said the father bird, and his mate said no more; for she knew by the tone of his voice when he had got to the end of his available information on any subject, and that beyond this point he did not like to be pressed.

"It's hard, it's very hard, Captain, and I can't submit as you do," said one of the men one day. He and the captain were sitting side by side at the look-out, their elbows on their knees, and their chins upon their hands.

"And yet it's harder for me than for



“ ‘ He doesn't understand you,’ said the Mother Albatross, . . . ‘ Couldn't you take a message to the ship yourself? It is nothing to your magnificent wings, and it is not his fault, poor creature, that he is not formed like you.’ ” (P. 114.)

you,' said the captain. 'One must die some day. It's not that. And you are a single man, Barker, without ties.'

"The man stooped down, and taking one of Carlo's long ears in his hand, played absently with it, as he said—

"No, sir. I am not married, it's true, and have no children. I feel for you, sir, from my heart. But, in a little house just out of Plymouth, that, God above knows, I can see this moment as clearly as I see you, there's a girl that has either forgotten me, or is breaking as good a heart as ever beat in woman's breast for the man that should have been her husband, and that's fast bound here upon a rock with sea-birds. The Lord knows best, Captain, but it comes hard. We all have our troubles, sir.'

"The captain laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Forgive me,' he said. 'God comfort you! God bless you!' And, rising hurriedly, he went forward, the big tears breaking over his cheeks, and sea and sky dancing together before his eyes.

"What do you dream of at night, Barker?' said the captain, on another day.

"Home, sir,' said Barker.

"Strange!' said the captain. 'So do I. In all the time we have been here, I have never once dreamed of this island, or of our day's work, nor even of seeing a sail. I dream of England night after night.'

"It's the same with myself, sir,' said Barker. 'I'm in Plymouth half my time, I may say. And off and on I dream of my father's old home in Surrey.'

"Are the men going to change their feathers, do you think?' the Mother Albatross inquired of her mate. 'They have a most wretched appearance. Only the dog looks like himself.' (The first excitement of pity and curiosity had subsided, and the good couple were now naturally inclined to be critical.)

"I detest that dog,' said Father Albatross. 'His idleness and arrogance make me quite sick. I think I want exercise, too, and I mean to have a good flight to-day;' and, spreading his broad wings, the bird sailed away.

"His excursion did not quite dispel his irritability. When he returned, he settled down by the captain, who was sitting listlessly, as usual, with Carlo at his feet.

"If you would only exert yourself,' began Father Albatross, 'something might come of it. You are getting as bad as the dog. Spread out those arms of yours, and see what you can do with them! If you could only fly a matter of a few miles, you would see a sail—and that's more than we had any reason to expect.'

"What can be the matter with the birds to-day?' said the captain, who was in rather an irritable mood himself. 'They are silent enough generally'—for the voice of the albatross is rarely heard at sea.

"Move your arms, I tell you!' croaked the albatross. 'Up and down—so!—and follow me.'

"I shall have the dog going at them next,' muttered the captain. 'Come along, Carlo.' And turning his back on Father Albatross, he moved away.

"He doesn't understand you,' said the Mother Albatross, who endeavoured, as is proper, to soothe her mate's irritability, and make peace. 'Couldn't you take a message to the ship yourself? It is nothing to your magnificent wings, and it is not his fault, poor creature, that he is not formed like you.'

"You speak very sensibly, my dear,' said Father Albatross; and once more he took flight over the sea.

"But he returned in even worse mood than before.

"Nothing can equal the stupidity of human beings,' he observed. 'I addressed myself to the captain. "There's an island

with shipwrecked men on it a few miles to the north-east," said I. "We shall see land in about ten days, ma'am," says the captain to a lady on deck. "There's as big a fool as yourself wrecked on an island north-east by north," I cried. "If you had the skill of a sparrow you could see it with your own eyes in five minutes." "It's very remarkable," said the captain, "I never heard one of those albatross make a sound before." "And never will again," said I; "it's a waste of time to talk to you. It won't take long to put you and yours under water like the rest." And away I came.

"I don't understand the cry of human beings myself," said his mate, "and I'm rather glad I do not; it would only irritate me. Perhaps he did not understand you."

"They are all stupid alike," said the father bird; "but I have done my best, and shall not disturb myself any more."

"The captain watched till sunset, and folded his hands, and bent his head as usual, and at last lay down to sleep. He dreamt of England, and of home—of a home that had been his long since, of a young wife, dead years ago. He dreamt that he lay, at early morning, in a sunny room in a little cottage where they had lived, and where, in summer, the morning sun awoke them not much later than the birds. He dreamt that his wife was by him, and that she thought that he was asleep, and that, so thinking, she put her arms round his neck to awaken him—that he lay still, and pretended to be slumbering on, and that, so lying, he saw her face bright with an unearthly beauty, and her eyes fixed on him with such intensity of expression that they held him like a spell. Then he felt her warm face come near to his, and she kissed his cheeks, and he heard her say, 'Wake up, my darling, I have something to show you.' Again she repeated vehemently, 'Awake! Awake!

Look! Look!' and then he opened his eyes.

"He was lying at the look-out, and Carlo was licking his face. It was a dream, and yet the voice was strong and clear in his ears, 'Awake! Awake! Look! Look!'

"A heavier hand than his wife's was on his shoulder, and Barker's rough voice (hoarser than usual), repeated the words of his dream.

"The captain's eyes followed the outstretched fingers to the horizon; and then his own voice grew hoarse, as he exclaimed—

"My God! it is a sail!"

Ida was not leaning on the little old lady's footstool now. She sat upright, her pale face whiter than its wont.

"Did the ship take them away?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, my dear. Their signals were seen, and the ship took them home to their friends who had believed them to be dead."

"Do people who have been drowned—I mean who have been thought to be drowned—ever come home *really*?" the child asked.

"Yes, really. Ida, my dear, I want you to remember that, as regards the captain and the crew, this is a true story."

Ida clasped her hands passionately together.

"Oh, Mrs. Overthway! Do you think papa will ever come home?"

"My child! my dear child!" sobbed the little old lady. "I think he will." . . .

"And he *is* alive—he is coming home!" Ida cried, as she recounted Mrs. Overthway's story to Nurse, who knew the principal fact of it already. "And she told it to me in this way not to frighten me. I did cry and laugh though, and was very silly; but she said I must not be foolish,

but brave like a captain's daughter, and that I ought to thank God for being so good to me, when the children of the other poor men who died will never have their fathers back in this world: and I am thankful, so thankful! Only it is like a mill going in my head, and I cannot help crying. And papa wrote me a long letter when he was on the island, and he sent it to Mrs. Overthaway because Uncle Garbett told him that I was fond of her, and that she would tell me nicely, and she was to read it, and to give it to me when she had told me. And it is such a lovely letter, with all about the island, and poor Barker, and dear old Carlo, and about the beautiful birds too, only Mrs. Overthaway made up a great deal of that herself. And please, Nurse, take off my black frock and never let me see it again, for the captain is really coming home, and oh! how I wish he would come!"

The poor child was terribly excited, but her habits of obedience stood her in good stead, for though she was vehemently certain that she could not possibly go to sleep, in compliance with Nurse's wishes, she went to bed, and there at last slept heavily and long; so that when she awoke there was only just time to dress and be ready to meet her father. She was putting out her treasures for him to look at—the carved fans and workboxes, the beads and handkerchiefs and feathers, the new letter and the old one—when the Captain came.

A week after the postman had delivered the letter which contained such wonderful news for Ida, he brought another to Mrs. Overthaway's green gate, addressed in the same handwriting—the Captain's. It was not from the Captain, however, but from Ida.

"MY DEAR, DEAR MRS. OVERTHEWAY,
"We got here on Saturday night, and

are so happy. Papa says when will you come and see us? I have got a little room to myself, and I have got a glass case under which I keep all the things that Papa ever sent me, and his letters. I bought it with part of a sovereign Uncle Garbett gave me when I came away. Do you know he was so very kind when I came away. He kissed me, and said, 'God bless you, my dear! You are a good child, a very good child;' and you know it was very kind of him, for I don't think I ever was good somehow with him. But he was *so* kind it made me cry, so I couldn't say anything, but I gave him a great many kisses, for I did not want him to know I love Papa the best. Carlo will put his nose on my knee, and I can't help making blots. He came with us in the railway carriage, and ate nearly all my sandwiches. When he and Papa roll on the hearthrug together, I mix their curls up and pretend I can't tell which is which. Only really Papa's have got some grey hairs in them: *we know why*. I always kiss the white hairs when I find them, and he says he thinks I shall kiss the colour into them again. He is so kind! I said I didn't like Nurse to wear her black dress *now*, and she said it was the best one she had, and she must wear it in the afternoon; so Papa said he would get us all some bright things, for he says English people dress in mud-colour, while people who live in much sunnier, brighter countries wear gay clothes. So we went into a shop this morning, and I asked him to get my things all blue, because it is his favourite colour. But he said he should choose Nurse's things himself. So he asked for a very smart dress, and the man asked what kind; and I said it was for a nurse, so he brought out a lot of prints, and at last Papa chose one with a yellow ground and carnations on it. He wanted very much to have got another one with very big flowers, but the man said it

was meant for curtains, not for dresses, so I persuaded him not to get it; but he says now he wishes he had, as it was much the best. Then he got a red shawl, and a bonnet ribbon of a kind of green tartan. Nurse was very much pleased, but she said they were too smart by half. But papa told her it was because she knew no better, and had never seen the parrots in the East Indian Islands. Yesterday we all went to church. Carlo came too, and when we got to the porch, Papa put up his hand, and said, 'Prayers, sir!' and Carlo lay down and stayed there till we came out. Papa says that he used to do so when he was going to say prayers on board ship, and that Carlo always lay quietly on deck till the service was over. Before we went to church Papa gave me a little parcel sealed up, to put in the plate. I asked him what it was, and he said it was a thank-offering. Before one of the prayers the clergyman said something. I don't quite remember the words, but it began, 'A sailor desires to thank God—' and oh! I *knew* who it was, and I squeezed his hand very tight, and I tried to pray every word of that prayer, only once I began to think of the island—but I *did* try! And indeed I do try to be very, very thankful, for I am so very happy! Papa got a letter from Barker this morning, and we are going out to choose him a wedding present. He sent a photograph of the girl he is going to marry, and I was rather disappointed, for I thought she would be very lovely, only, perhaps, rather sad-looking; but she doesn't look very pretty, and is sitting in rather a vulgar dress, with a photograph book in her hand. Her dress is tartan, and queer-looking about the waist, you know, like Nurse's, and it is coloured in the picture, and her brooch is gilt. Papa laughs, and says Barker likes colour, as he does; and he says he thinks she has a nice face, and he knows she is very good, and

very fond of Barker, and that Barker thinks her beautiful. He didn't write before he went to see her, like Papa. He just walked up to the house, and found her sitting at the window with his photograph in her hand. She said she had been so restless all day, she could do nothing but sit and look at it. Wasn't it funny? She had been very ill with thinking he was dead, and Barker says she nearly died of the joy of seeing him again. Papa sends you his love, and I send lots and lots of mine, and millions of kisses. And please, *please* come and see us if you can, for I miss you every morning, and I do love you, and am always your grateful and affectionate

"IDA."

"P.S. I am telling Papa all your stories by bits. And do you know *he* went to sleep whilst I was telling him Mrs. Moss!"

Chim! chime! chim! chime! chim! chime!

The story is ended, but the bells still call to Morning Prayer, and life goes on. The little old lady comes through the green gate, and looks over the way, but there is no face at that window now: something in it made her start for an instant, but it is only a looking-glass, for the smart toilette-table has been brought back to the window where Ida used to kneel, and the nursery is a spare bedroom once more. That episode in this dull house in the quiet street is over and gone by. The old lady thinks so rather sadly as she goes where the bells are calling. The pale, eager, loving little face that turned to her in its loneliness, now brightens a happy home; but the remembrance of it is with the little old lady still, pleasant as the remembrance of flowers when winter has come. Yes, truly, not the least pleasant of Mrs. Overtheway's Remembrances.

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CHANCERY LANE.



“ ‘Well, I suppose I am, sir,’ said the bee-master, and in he came.” P. 18.

WE AND THE WORLD:

A BOOK FOR BOYS.

BY JULIANA HORATIA EWING,

AUTHOR OF

"MELCHIOR'S DREAM, AND OTHER TALES," "JAN OF THE WINDMILL,"
"JACKANAPES," ETC.

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. L. JONES.

NEW EDITION.

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CHISWICK PRESS :—C. WHITTINGHAM AND CO., TOOKS COURT,
CHANCERY LANE.

Dedicated

TO MY TWELVE NEPHEWS,

WILLIAM, FRANCIS, STEPHEN, PHILIP, LEONARD,

GODFREY, AND DAVID SMITH;

REGINALD, NICHOLAS, AND IVOR GATTY;

ALEXANDER, AND CHARLES SCOTT GATTY.

J. H. E.

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WE AND THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

"All these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled security, and hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation."

Washington Irving's Sketch Book.

IT was a great saying of my poor mother's, especially if my father had been out of spirits about the crops, or the rise in wages, or our prospects, and had thought better of it again, and showed her the bright side of things, "Well, my dear, I'm sure we've much to be thankful for."

Which they had, and especially, I often think, for the fact that I was not the eldest son. I gave them more trouble than I can think of with a comfortable conscience as it was; but they had Jem to tread in my father's shoes, and he was a good son to them—GOD bless him for it!

I can remember hearing my father say—"It's bad enough to have Jack with his nose in a book, and his head in the clouds, on a fine June day, with the hay all out, and the glass falling; but if Jem had been a lad of whims and fancies, I think it would have broken my poor old heart."

I often wonder what made me bother my head with books, and where the perverse spirit came from that possessed me, and tore me, and drove me forth into the world. It did not come from my parents. My mother's family were far from being literary or even enterprising, and my father's people were a race of small yeomen squires, whose talk was of dogs and horses and cattle and the price of hay. We were north-of-England people, but not of a commercial or adventurous class, though we were within easy reach of some of the great manufacturing centres. Quiet country folk we were; old-fashioned, and boastful of our old-fashionedness, albeit it meant little more than that our manners and customs were a generation behind-hand of the more cultivated folk, who live nearer to London. We were proud of our name too, which is written in the earliest registers and re-

cords of the parish, honourably connected with the land we lived on; but which may be searched for in vain in the lists of great or even learned Englishmen.

It never troubled dear old Jem that there had not been a man of mark among all the men who had handed on our name from generation to generation. He had no feverish ambitions, and as to books, I doubt if he ever opened a volume, if he could avoid it, after he wore out three horn-books and our mother's patience in learning his letters—not even the mottle-backed prayer-books which were handed round for family prayers, and out of which we said the psalms for the day, verse about with my father. I generally found the place, and Jem put his arm over my shoulder and read with me.

He was a yeoman born. I can just remember—when I was not three years old and he was barely four—the fright our mother got from his fearless familiarity with the beasts about the homestead. He and I were playing on the grass plat before the house when Dolly, an ill-tempered dun cow we knew well by sight and name, got into the garden and drew near us. As I sat on the grass—my head at no higher level than the buttercups in the field beyond—Dolly loomed so large above me that I felt frightened and began to cry. But Jem, only conscious that she had no business there, picked up a stick nearly as big as himself, and trotted indignantly to drive her out. Our mother caught sight of him from an upper window, and knowing that the temper of the cow was not to be trusted, she called wildly to Jem, "Come in, dear, quick! Come in! Dolly's loose!"

"I drive her out!" was Master Jem's reply; and with his little straw hat well on the back of his head, he waddled bravely up to the cow, flourishing his stick. The process interested me, and I dried my tears and encouraged my brother; but Dolly looked sourly at him, and began to lower her horns.

"Shoo! shoo!" shouted Jem, waving his arms in farming-man fashion, and belabouring Dolly's neck with the stick. "Shoo! shoo!"

Dolly planted her forefeet, and dipped her head for a push, but catching another small whack on her face, and more authoritative "Shoos!" she changed her mind, and swinging heavily round, trotted off towards the field, followed by Jem, waving, shouting, and victorious. My mother got out in time to help him to fasten the gate, which he was much too small to do by himself, though, with true squirely instincts, he was trying to secure it.

But from our earliest days we both lived on intimate terms with all the live stock. "Laddie," an old black cart-horse, was one of our chief friends. Jem and I used to sit, one behind the other, on his broad back, when our little legs could barely straddle across, and to "grip" with our knees in orthodox fashion was a matter of principle, but impossible in practice. Laddie's pace was always discreet, however, and I do not think we should have found a saddle any improvement, even as to safety, upon his warm, satin-smooth back. We steered him more by shouts and smacks than by the one short end of a dirty rope which was our apology for reins; that is, if we had any hand in guiding his course. I am now disposed to think that Laddie guided himself.

But our beast friends were many. The yellow yard-dog always slobbered joyfully at our approach; partly moved, I fancy, by love for us, and partly by the exciting hope of being let off his chain. When we went into the farmyard the fowls came running to our feet for corn, the pigeons fluttered down over our heads for peas, and the pigs humped themselves against the wall of the sty as tightly as they could lean, in hopes of having their backs scratched. The long sweet faces of the plough horses, as they turned in the furrows, were as familiar to us as the faces of any other labourers in our father's fields, and we got fond of the lambs and ducks and chickens, and got used to their being killed and eaten when our acquaintance reached a certain date, like other farm-bred folk, which is one amongst the many proofs of the adaptability of human nature.

So far so good, on my part as well as Jem's. That I should like the animals "on the place"—the domesticated animals, the workable animals, the eatable animals—this was right and natural, and befitting my father's son. But my far greater fancy for wild, queer, useless, mischievous, and even disgusting creatures often got me into trouble. Want of sympathy became absolute annoyance as I grew older, and wandered farther, and adopted a perfect menagerie, of odd beasts in whom my

friends could see no good qualities: such as the snake I kept warm in my trousers-pocket; the stickleback that I am convinced I tamed in his own waters; the toad for whom I built a red house of broken drainpipes at the back of the strawberry bed, where I used to go and tickle his head on the sly; and the long-whiskered rat in the barn, who knew me well, and whose death nearly broke my heart, though I had seen generations of unoffending ducklings pass to the kitchen without a tear.

I think it must have been the beasts that made me take to reading: I was so fond of Buffon's "Natural History," of which there was an English abridgment on the dining-room bookshelves.

But my happiest reading days began after our chief bookseller's agent came round, and teased my father into taking in the "Penny Cyclopædia;" and those numbers in which there was a beast, bird, fish, or reptile were the numbers for me!

I must, however, confess that if a love for reading had been the only way in which I had gone astray from the family habits and traditions, I don't think I should have had much to complain of in the way of blame.

My father "pish"ed and "pshaw"ed when he caught me "poking over" books, but my dear mother was inclined to regard me as a genius, whose learning might bring renown of a new kind into the family. In a quiet way of her own, as she went gently about household matters, or knitted my father's stockings, she was a great day-dreamer—one of the most unselfish kind, however; a builder of air-castles, for those she loved to dwell in; planned, fitted, and furnished according to the measure of her affections.

It was perhaps because my father always began by disparaging her suggestions that (by the balancing action of some instinctive sense of justice) he almost always ended by adopting them, whether they were wise or foolish. He came at last to listen very tolerantly when she dilated on my future greatness.

"And if he isn't quite so good a farmer as Jem, it's not as if he were the eldest, you know, my dear. I'm sure we've much to be thankful for that dear Jem takes after you as he does. But if Jack turns out a genius, which please God we may live to see and be proud of, he'll make plenty of money, and he must live with Jem when we're gone, and let Jem manage it for him, for clever people are never any good at taking care of what they get. And when their families get too big for the old house, love, Jack must build, as he'll be well able to afford to do, and Jem must let him have the land. The Ladycroft would be as good as anywhere, and a pretty name for the house.

It would be a good thing to have some one at that end of the property too, and then the boys would always be together."

Poor dear mother! The kernel of her speech lay in the end of it—"The boys would always be together." I am sure in her tender heart she blessed my bookish genius, which was to make wealth as well as fame, and so keep me "about the place," and the home birds for ever in the nest.

I knew nothing of it then, of course; but at this time she used to turn my father's footsteps towards the Ladycroft every Sunday, between the services, and never wearied of planning my house.

She was standing one day, her smooth brow knitted in perplexity, before the big pink thorn, and had stood so long absorbed in this brown study, that my father said, with a sly smile—

"Well, love, and where are you now?"

"In the dairy, my dear," she answered quite gravely. "The window is to the north of course, and I'm afraid the thorn must come down."

My father laughed heartily. He had some sense of humour, but my mother had none. She was one of the sweetest-tempered women that ever lived, and never dreamed that any one was laughing at her. I have heard my father say she lay awake that night, and when he asked her why she could not sleep he found she was fretting about the pink thorn.

"It looked so pretty to-day, my dear; and thorns are so bad to move!"

My father knew her too well to hope to console her by joking about it. He said gravely: "There's plenty of time yet, love. The boys are only just in trousers; and we may think of some way to spare it before we come to bricks and mortar."

"I've thought of it every way, my dear, I'm afraid," said my mother with a sigh. But she had full confidence in my father—a trouble shared with him was half cured, and she soon fell asleep.

She certainly had a vivid imagination, though it never was cultivated to literary ends. Perhaps, after all, I inherited that idle fancy, those unsatisfied yearnings of my restless heart, from her! Mental peculiarities are said to come from one's mother.

It was Jem who inherited her sweet temper.

Dear old Jem! He and I were the best of good friends always, and that sweet temper of his had no doubt much to do with it. He was very much led by me, though I was the younger, and whatever mischief we got into it was always my fault.

It was I who persuaded him to run away from school, under the, as it proved, insufficient disguise of walnut-juice on our faces and hands. It was I who began to dig the hole which was to

take us through from the kitchen-garden to the other side of the world. (Jem helped me to fill it up again, when the gardener made a fuss about our having chosen the asparagus-bed as the point of departure, which we did because the earth was soft there.) In desert islands or castles, balloons or boats, my hand was first and foremost, and mischief or amusement of every kind, by earth, air, or water, was planned for us by me.

Now and then, however, Jem could crow over me. How he did deride me when I asked our mother the foolish question—"Have bees whiskers?"

The bee who betrayed me into this folly was a bumble of the utmost beauty. The bars of his coat "burned" as "brightly" as those of the tiger in Wombwell's menagerie, and his fur was softer than my mother's black velvet mantle. I knew, for I had kissed him lightly as he sat on the window-frame. I had seen him brushing first one side and then the other side of his head, with an action so exactly that of my father brushing his whiskers on Sunday morning, that I thought the bee might be trimming his; not knowing that he was sweeping the flower-dust off his antennæ with his legs, and putting it into his waistcoat pocket to make bee bread of.

It was the liberty I took in kissing him that made him not sit still any more, and hindered me from examining his cheeks for myself. He began to dance all over the window, humming his own tune, and before he got tired of dancing he found a chink open at the top sash, and sailed away like a spot of plush upon the air.

I had thus no opportunity of becoming intimate with him, but he was the cause of a more lasting friendship—my friendship with Isaac Irvine, the beekeeper. For when I asked that silly question, my mother said, "Not that I ever saw, love;" and my father said, "If he wants to know about bees, he should go to old Isaac. He'll tell him plenty of queer stories about them."

The first time I saw the beekeeper was in church, on Catechism Sunday, in circumstances which led to my disgracing myself in a manner that must have been very annoying to my mother, who had taken infinite pains in teaching us.

The provoking part of it was that I had not had a fear of breaking down. With poor Jem it was very different. He took twice as much pains as I did, but he could not get things into his head, and even if they did stick there he found it almost harder to say them properly. We began to learn the Catechism when we were three years old, and we went on till long after we were in trousers; and I am sure Jem never got the three words "and an inheritor" tidily off the tip of his tongue within my remembrance. And I have seen both

him and my mother crying over them on a hot Sunday afternoon. He was always in a fright when we had to say the Catechism in church, and that day, I remember, he shook so that I could hardly stand straight myself, and Bob Furniss, the blacksmith's son, who stood on the other side of him, whispered quite loud, "Eh! see thee, how Master Jem *dodders!*" for which Jem gave him an eye as black as his father's shop afterwards, for Jem could use his fists if he could not learn by heart.

But at the time he could not even compose himself enough to count down the line of boys and calculate what question would come to him. I did, and when he found he had only got the First Commandment, he was more at ease, and though the second, which fell to me, is much longer, I was not in the least afraid of forgetting it, for I could have done the whole of my duty to my neighbour if it had been necessary.

Jem got through very well, and I could hear my mother blessing him over the top of the pew behind our backs; but just as he finished, no less than three bees, who had been hovering over the heads of the workhouse boys opposite, all settled down together on Isaac Irvine's bare head.

At the public catechising, which came once a year, and after the second lesson at evening prayer, the grown-up members of the congregation used to draw near to the end of their pews to see and hear how we acquitted ourselves, and, as it happened on this particular occasion, Master Isaac was standing exactly opposite to me. As he leaned forward, his hands crossed on the pew-top before him, I had been a good deal fascinated by his face, which was a very noble one in its rugged way, with snow-white hair and intense, keenly observing eyes, and when I saw the three bees settle on him without his seeming to notice it, I cried, "They'll sting you!" before I thought of what I was doing; for I had been severely stung that week myself, and knew what it felt like, and how little good powder-blue does.

With attending to the bees I had not heard the parson say, "Second Commandment?" and as he was rather deaf he did not hear what I said. But of course he knew it was not long enough for the right answer, and he said, "Speak up, my boy," and Jem tried to start me by whispering, "Thou shalt not make to thyself"—but the three bees went on sitting on Master Isaac's head, and though I began the Second Commandment, I could not take my eyes off them, and when Master Isaac saw this he smiled and nodded his white head, and said, "Never you mind me, sir. They won't sting the old beekeeper." This assertion so completely turned my head that every other idea

went out of it, and after saying "or in the earth beneath" three times, and getting no further, the parson called out, "Third Commandment?" and I was passed over—"out of respect to the family," as I was reminded for a twelvemonth afterwards—and Jem pinched my leg to comfort me, and my mother sank down on the seat, and did not take her face out of her pocket-handkerchief till the workhouse boys were saying "the sacraments."

My mother was our only teacher till Jem was nine and I was eight years old. We had a thin, soft-backed reading book, bound in black cloth, on the cover of which in gold letters was its name "Chick-seed without Chick-weed;" and in this book she wrote our names, and the date at the end of each lesson we conned fairly through. I had got into Part II., which was "in words of four letters," and had the chapter about the Ship in it, before Jem's name figured at the end of the chapter about the Dog in Part I.

My mother was very glad that this chapter seemed to please Jem, and that he learned to read it quickly, for, good-natured as he was, Jem was too fond of fighting and laying about him: and though it was only "in words of three letters," this brief chapter contained a terrible story, and an excellent moral, which I remember well even now.

It was called "The Dog."

"Why do you cry? The Dog has bit my leg. Why did he do so? I had my bat and I hit him as he lay on the mat, so he ran at me and bit my leg. Ah, you may not use the bat if you hit the Dog. It is a hot day, and the dog may go mad. One day a Dog bit a boy in the arm, and the boy had his arm cut off, for the Dog was mad. And did the boy die? Yes, he did die in a day or two. It is not fit to hit a Dog if he lie on the mat and is not a bad Dog. Do not hit a Dog, or a cat, or a boy."

Jem not only got through this lesson much better than usual, but he lingered at my mother's knees, to point with his own little stumpy forefinger to each recurrence of the words "hit a Dog," and read them all by himself.

"Very good boy," said Mother, who was much pleased. "And now read this last sentence once more, and very nicely."

"Do—not—hit—a—dog—or—a—cat—or—a—boy," read Jem in a high sing-song, and with a face of blank indifference, and then with a hasty dog's-ear he turned back to the previous page, and spelled out, "I had my bat and I hit him as he lay on the mat" so well, that my mother caught him to her bosom and covered him with kisses.

"He'll be as good a scholar as Jack yet!" she

exclaimed. "But don't forget, my darling, that my Jem must never 'hit a dog, or a cat, or a boy.' Now, love, you may put the book away."

Jem stuck out his lips and looked down, and hesitated. He seemed almost disposed to go on with his lessons. But he changed his mind, and shutting the book with a bang, he scampered off. As he passed the ottoman near the door, he saw Kitty, our old tortoise-shell puss, lying on it, and (moved perhaps by the occurrence of the word *cat* in the last sentence of the lesson) he gave her such a whack with the flat side of "Chick-seed" that she bounced up into the air like a sky-rocket, Jem crying out as he did so, "I had my bat, and I hit him as he lay on the mat."

It was seldom enough that Jem got anything by heart, but he had certainly learned this; for when an hour later I went to look for him in the garden, I found him panting with the exertion of having laid my nice, thick, fresh green crop of mustard and cress flat with the back of the coal-shovel, which he could barely lift, but with which he was still battering my salad-bed, chanting triumphantly at every stroke, "I had my bat, and I hit him as he lay on the mat." He was quite out of breath, and I had not much difficulty in pummeling him as he deserved.

Which shows how true it is, as my dear mother said, that "you never know what to do for the best in bringing up boys."

Just about the time that we outgrew "Chick-seed," and that it was allowed on all hands that even for quiet country-folk with no learned notions it was high time we were sent to school, our parents were spared the trouble of looking out for a school for us by the fact that a school came to us instead, and nothing less than an "Academy" was opened within three-quarters of a mile of my father's gate.

Walnut-tree Farm was an old house that stood some little way from the road in our favourite lane—a lane full of wild roses and speedwell, with a tiny footpath of disjointed flags like an old pack-horse track. Grass and milfoil grew thickly between the stones, and the turf stretched half-way over the road from each side, for there was little traffic in the lane, beyond the yearly rumble of the harvesting waggons; and few foot-passengers, except a labourer now and then, a pair or two of rustic lovers at sundown, a few knots of children in the blackberry season and the cows coming home to milking.

Jem and I played there a good deal, but then we lived close by.

We were very fond of the old place and there were two good reasons for the charm it had in our eyes. In the first place, the old man who lived

alone in it (for it had ceased to be the dwelling-house of a real farm) was an eccentric old miser, the chief object of whose existence seemed to be to thwart any attempt to pry into the daily details of it. What manner of stimulus this was to boyish curiosity needs no explanation, much as it needs excuse.

In the second place, Walnut-tree Farm was so utterly different from the house which was our home, that everything about it was attractive from mere unaccustomedness.

Our house had been rebuilt from the foundations by my father. It was square-built and very ugly, but it was in such excellent repair that one could never indulge a more lawless fancy towards any chink or cranny about it than a desire to "point" the same with a bit of mortar.

Why it was that my ancestor, who built the old house, and who was not a bit better educated or farther-travelled than my father, had built a pretty one, whilst my father built an ugly one, is one of the many things I do not know, and wish I did.

From the old sketches of it which my grandfather painted on the parlour handscreens, I think it must have been like a larger edition of the farm; that is, with long mullioned windows, a broad and gracefully proportioned doorway with several shallow steps and quaintly-ornamented lintel; bits of fine work and ornamentation about the wood-work here and there, put in as if they had been done, not for the look of the thing, but for the love of it, and whitewash over the house-front, and over the apple-trees in the orchard.

That was what our ancestor's home was like; and it was the sort of house that became Walnut-tree Academy, where Jem and I went to school.

CHAPTER II.

Table:—"Ha, you! A little more upon the dismal (forming their countenances); this fellow has a good mortal look, place him near the corpse; that wainscoat face must be o' top of the stairs; that fellow's almost in a fright (that looks as if he were full of some strange misery) at the end of the hall. So—but I'll fix you all myself. Let's have no laughing now on any provocation."

The Funeral, STEELE.

AT one time I really hoped to make the acquaintance of the old miser of Walnut-tree Farm. It was when we saved the life of his cat.

He was very fond of that cat, I think, and it was, to say the least of it, as eccentric-looking as its master. One eye was yellow and the other was blue, which gave it a strange, uncanny expression,

and its rust-coloured fur was not common either as to tint or markings.

How dear old Jem did belabour the boy we found torturing it! He was much older and bigger than we were, but we were two to one, which we reckoned fair enough, considering his size, and that the cat had to be saved somehow. The poor thing's forepaws were so much hurt that it could not walk, so we carried it to the farm, and I stood on the shallow doosteps, and under the dial, on which was written—

"Tempora mutantur!"—

and the old miser came out, and we told him about the cat, and he took it and said we were good boys, and I hoped he would have asked us to go in, but he did not, though we lingered a little; he only put his hand into his pocket, and very slowly brought out sixpence.

"No, thank you," said I, rather indignantly. "We don't want anything for saving the poor cat."

"I am very fond of it," he said apologetically, and putting the sixpence carefully back; but I believe he alluded to the cat.

I felt more and more strongly that he ought to invite us into the parlour—if there was a parlour—and I took advantage of a backward movement on his part to move one shallow step nearer, and said, in an easy conversational tone, "Your cat has very curious eyes."

He came out again, and his own eyes glared in the evening light as he touched me with one of his fingers in a way that made me shiver, and said, "If I had been an old woman, and that cat had lived with me in the days when this house was built, I should have been hanged, or burned as a witch. Twelve men would have done it—twelve reasonable and respectable men!" He paused, looking over my head at the sky, and then added, "But in all good conscience—mind, in all good conscience!"

And after another pause he touched me again (this time my teeth chattered), and whispered loudly in my ear, "Never serve on a jury!" After which he banged the door in our faces, and Jem caught hold of my jacket and cried; "Oh! he's quite mad, he'll murder us!" and we took each other by the hand and ran home as fast as our feet would carry us.

We never saw the old miser again, for he died some months afterwards, and, strange to relate, Jem and I were invited to the funeral.

It was a funeral not to be forgotten. The old man had left the money for it, and a memorandum, with the minutest directions, in the hands of his lawyer. If he had wished to be more popular

after his death than he had been in his lifetime, he could not have hit upon any better plan to conciliate in a lump the approbation of his neighbours than that of providing for what undertakers call "a first-class funeral." The good custom of honouring the departed, and committing their bodies to the earth with care and respect, was carried, in our old-fashioned neighbourhood, to a point at which what began in reverence ended in what was barely decent, and what was meant to be most melancholy became absolutely comical. But a sense of the congruous and the incongruous was not cultivated amongst us, whereas solid value (in size, quantity and expense) was perhaps overestimated. So our furniture, our festivities, and our funerals bore witness.

No one had ever seen the old miser's furniture, and he gave no festivities; but he made up for it in his funeral.

Children, like other uneducated classes, enjoy domestic details, and going over the ins and outs of other people's affairs behind their backs; especially when the interest is heightened by a touch of gloom, or perfected by the addition of some personal importance in the matter. Jem and I were always fond of funerals, but this funeral, and the fuss that it made in the parish, we were never likely to forget.

Even our own household was so demoralised by the grim gossip of the occasion that Jem and I were accused of being unable to amuse ourselves, and of listening to our elders. It was perhaps fortunate for us that a favourite puppy died the day before the funeral, and gave us the opportunity of burying him.

*"As if our whole vocation
Were endless imitation—"*

Jem and I had already laid our gardens waste, and built a rude wall of broken bricks round them to make a churchyard; and I can clearly remember that we had so far profited by what we had overheard among our elders, that I had caught up some phrases which I was rather proud of displaying, and that I quite overawed Jem by the air with which I spoke of "the melancholy occasion"—the "wishes of deceased"—and the "feelings of survivors" when we buried the puppy.

It was understood that I could not attend the puppy's funeral in my proper person, because I wished to be the undertaker; but the happy thought struck me of putting my wheelbarrow alongside of the brick wall with a note inside it to the effect that I had "sent my carriage as a mark of respect."

In one point we could not emulate the real funeral; that was carried out "regardless of ex-

pense." The old miser had left a long list of the names of the people who were to be invited to it and to its attendant feast, in which was not only my father's name, but *Jem's* and mine. Three yards was the correct length of the black silk scarves which it was the custom in the neighbourhood to send to dead people's friends; but the old miser's funeral-scarves were a whole yard longer, and of such stiffly ribbed silk that Mr. Soot, the mourning draper, assured my mother that "it would stand of itself." The black gloves cost six shillings a pair, and the sponge-cakes, which used to be sent with the gloves and scarves, were on this occasion ornamented with weeping willows in white sugar.

Jem and I enjoyed the cake, but the pride we felt in our scarves and gloves was simply boundless. What pleased us particularly was that our funeral finery was not enclosed with my father's. Mr. Soot's man delivered three separate envelopes at the door, and they looked like letters from some bereaved giant. The envelopes were twenty inches by fourteen, and made of cartridge-paper; the black border was two inches deep, and the black seals must have consumed a stick of sealing-wax among them. They contained the gloves and the scarves, which were lightly gathered together in the middle with knots of black gauze ribbon.

How exquisitely absurd *Jem* and I must have looked with four yards of stiff black silk attached to our little hats I can imagine, if I cannot clearly remember. My dear mother dressed us and saw us off (for, with some curious relic of pre-civilised notions, women were not allowed to appear at funerals), and I do not think she perceived anything odd in our appearance. She was very gentle, and approved of everything that was considered right by the people she was used to, and she had only two anxieties about our scarves: first, that they should show the full four yards of respect to the memory of the deceased; and secondly, that we should keep them out of the dust, so that they might "come in useful afterwards."

She fretted a little because she had not thought of changing our gloves for smaller sizes (they were eight and a quarter); but my father "pish"ed and "pshaw"ed, and said it was better than if they had been too small, and that we should be sure to be late if my mother went on fidgeting. So we pulled them on—with ease—and picked up the tails of our hatbands—with difficulty—and followed my father, our hearts beating with pride, and my mother and the maids watching us from the door. We arrived quite half an hour earlier than we need have done, but the Lane was already crowded with complimentary carriages, and curious bystanders, before whom we held our heads and

hatbands up; and the scent of the wild roses was lost for that day in an all-pervading atmosphere of black dye. We were very tired, I remember, by the time that our turn came to be put into a carriage by Mr. Soot, who murmured—"Pocket handkerchiefs, gentlemen"—and, following the example of a very pale-faced stranger who was with us, we drew out the clean handkerchiefs with which our mother had supplied us, and covered our faces with them.

At least *Jem* says he shut *his* eyes tight, and kept his face covered the whole way, but he always *was* so conscientious! I held my handkerchief as well as I could with my gloves; but I contrived to peep from behind it, and to see the crowd that lined the road to watch us as we wound slowly on.

If these outsiders, who only saw the procession and the funeral, were moved almost to enthusiasm by the miser's post-mortem liberality, it may be believed that the guests who were bidden to the feast did not fail to obey the ancient precept, and speak well of the dead. The tables (they were rickety) literally groaned under the weight of eatables and drinkables, and the dinner was so prolonged that *Jem* and I got terribly tired, in spite of the fun of watching the faces of the men we did not know, to see which got the reddest.

My father wanted us to go home before the reading of the will, which took place in the front parlour; but the lawyer said, "I think the young gentlemen should remain," for which we were very much obliged to him; though the pale-faced man said quite crossly—"Is there any special reason for crowding the room with children, who are not even relatives of the deceased?" which made us feel so much ashamed that I think we should have slipped out by ourselves; but the lawyer, who made no answer, pushed us gently before him to the top of the room, which was soon far too full to get out of by the door.

It was very damp and musty. In several places the paper hung in great strips from the walls, and the oddest part of all was that every article of furniture in the room, and even the hearthrug, was covered with sheets of newspaper pinned over to preserve it. I sat in the corner of a sofa, where I could read the trial of a man who murdered somebody twenty-five years before, but I never got to the end of it, for it went on behind a very fat man who sat next to me, and he leaned back all the time and hid it. *Jem* sat on a little footstool, and fell asleep with his head on my knee, and did not wake till I nudged him, when our names were read out in the will. Even then he only half awoke, and the fat man drove his elbow into me and hurt me dreadfully for whispering in *Jem's* ear

that the old miser had left us ten pounds apiece, for having saved the life of his cat.

I do not think any of the strangers (they were distant connections of the old man; he had no near relations) had liked our being there; and the lawyer, who was very kind, had had to tell them several times over that we really had been invited to the funeral. After our legacies were known about they were so cross that we managed to scramble through the window, and wandered round the garden. As we sat under the trees we could hear high words within, and by-and-by all the men came out and talked in angry groups about the will. For when all was said and done, it appeared that the old miser had not left a penny to any one of the funeral party but Jem and me, and that he had left Walnut-tree Farm to a certain Mrs. Wood, of whom nobody knew anything.

"The wording is so peculiar," the fat man said to the pale-faced man and a third who had come out with them, "'left to her as a sign of sympathy, if not an act of reparation.' He must have known whether he owed her any reparation or not, if he were in his senses."

"Exactly. If he were in his senses," said the third man.

"Where's the money?—that's what I say," said the pale-faced man.

"Exactly, sir. That's what I say, too," said the fat man.

"There are only two fields, besides the house," said the third. "He must have had money, and the lawyer knows of no investments of any kind, he says."

"Perhaps he has left it to his cat," he added, looking very nastily at Jem and me.

"It's oddly put, too," murmured the pale-faced relation. "The two fields, the house and furniture, and everything of every sort therein contained." And the lawyer coming up at that moment, he went slowly back into the house, looking about him as he went, as if he had lost something.

As the lawyer approached, the fat man got very red in the face.

"He was as mad as a hatter, sir," he said, "and we shall dispute the will."

"I think you will be wrong," said the lawyer, blandly. "He was eccentric, my dear sir, very eccentric; but eccentricity is not insanity, and you will find that the will will stand."

Jem and I were sitting on an old garden-seat, but the men had talked without paying any attention to us. At this moment Jem, who had left me a minute or two before, came running back and said: "Jack! Do come and look in at the parlour window. That man with the white face is peeping

everywhere, and under all the newspapers, and he's made himself so dusty! It's such fun!"

Too happy at the prospect of anything in the shape of fun, I followed Jem on tiptoe, and when we stood by the open window with our hands over our mouths to keep us from laughing, the pale-faced man was just struggling with the inside lids of an old japanned tea-caddy.

He did not see us, he was too busy, and he did not hear us, for he was talking to himself, and we heard him say, "Everything of every sort therein contained."

I suppose the lawyer was right, and that the fat man was convinced of it, for neither he nor any one else disputed the old miser's will. Jem and I each opened an account in the Savings Bank, and Mrs. Wood came into possession of the place.

Public opinion went up and down a good deal about the old miser still. When it leaked out that he had worded the invitation to his funeral to the effect that being quite unable to tolerate the follies of his fellow-creatures, and the antics and absurdities which were necessary to entertain them, he had much pleasure in welcoming his neighbours to a feast, at which he could not reasonably be expected to preside—everybody who heard it agreed that he must have been mad.

But it was a long sentence to remember, and not a very easy one to understand, and those who saw the plumes and the procession, and those who had a talk with the undertaker, and those who got a yard more than usual of such very good black silk, and those who were able to remember what they had had for dinner, were all charitably inclined to believe that the old man's heart had not been far from being in the right place, at whatever angle his head had been set on.

And then by degrees curiosity moved to Mrs. Wood. Who was she? What was she like? What was she to the miser? Would she live at the farm?

To some of these questions the carrier, who was the first to see her, replied. She was "a quiet, genteel-looking sort of a grey-haired widow lady, who looked as if she'd seen a deal of trouble, and was badly off."

The neighbourhood was not unkindly, and many folk were ready to be civil to the widow if she came to live there.

"But she never will," everybody said. "She must let it. Perhaps the new doctor might think of it at a low rent, he'd be glad of the field for his horse. What could she do with an old place like that, and not a penny to keep it up with?"

What she did do was to have a school there, and that was how Walnut-tree Farm became Walnut-tree Academy.

CHAPTER III.

"What are little boys made of, made of?
What are little boys made of?"

Nursery Rhyme.

WHEN the school was opened, Jem and I were sent there at once. Everybody said it was "time we were sent somewhere," and that "we were getting too wild for home."

I got so tired of hearing this at last, that one day I was goaded to reply that "home was getting too tame for me." And Jem, who always backed me up, said, "And me too." For which piece of swagger we forfeited our suppers; but when we went to bed we found pieces of cake under our pillows, for my mother could not bear us to be short of food, however badly we behaved.

I do not know whether the trousers had anything to do with it, but about the time that Jem and I were put into trousers we lived in a chronic state of behaving badly. What makes me feel particularly ashamed in thinking of it is, that I know it was not that we came under the pressure of any overwhelming temptations to misbehave and yielded through weakness, but that, according to an expressive nursery formula, we were "seeing how naughty we could be." I think we were genuinely anxious to see this undesirable climax; in some measure as a matter of experiment, to which all boys are prone, and in which dangerous experiments, and experiments likely to be followed by explosion, are naturally preferred. Partly, too, from an irresistible impulse to "raise a row," and take one's luck of the results. This craving to disturb the calm current of events, and the good conduct and composure of one's neighbours as a matter of diversion, must be incomprehensible by phlegmatic people, who never feel it, whilst some Irishmen, I fancy, never quite conquer it, perhaps because they never quite cease to be boys. In any degree I do not for an instant excuse it, and in excess it must be simply intolerable by better-regulated minds.

But really, boys who are pickles should be put into jars with sound stoppers, like other pickles, and I wonder that mothers and cooks do not get pots like those that held the forty thieves, and do it.

I fancy it was because we happened to be in this rough, defiant, mischievous mood, just about the time that Mrs. Wood opened her school, that we did not particularly like our schoolmistress. If I had been fifteen years older, I should soon have got beyond the first impression created by

her severe dress, close widow's cap and straight grey hair, and have discovered that the outline of her face was absolutely beautiful, and I might possibly have detected, what most people failed to detect, that an odd unpleasant effect, caused by the contrast between her general style, and an occasional lightness and rapidity and grace of movement in her slender figure, came from the fact that she was much younger than she looked and affected to be. The impression I did receive of her appearance I communicated to my mother in far from respectful pantomime.

"Well, love, and what do you think of Mrs. Wood?" said she.

"I think," chanted I, in that high brassy pitch of voice which Jem and I had adopted for this bravado period of our existence—"I think she's like our old white hen that turned up its eyes and died of the pip. Lack-a-daisy-dee! Lack-a-daisy-dee!"

And I twisted my body about, and strolled up and down the room with a supposed travestie of Mrs. Wood's movements.

"So she is," said faithful Jem. "Lack-a-daisy-dee! Lack-a-daisy-dee!" and he wriggled about after me, and knocked over the Berlin wool-basket.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said our poor mother.

Jem righted the basket, and I took a run and a flying leap over it, and having cleared it successfully, took another, and yet another, each one soothing my feelings to the extent by which it shocked my mother's. At the third bound, Jem, not to be behindhand, uttered a piercing yell from behind the sofa.

"Good gracious, what's the matter?" cried my mother.

"It's the war-whoop of the Objibeway Indians," I promptly explained, and having emitted another, to which I flattered myself Jem's had been as nothing for hideousness, we departed in file to raise a row in the kitchen.

Summer passed into autumn. Jem and I really liked going to school, but it was against our principles at that time to allow that we liked anything that we ought to like.

Some sincere but mistaken efforts to improve our principles were made, I remember, by a middle-aged single lady, who had known my mother in her girlhood, and who was visiting her at this unlucky stage of our career. Having failed to cope with us directly, she adopted the plan of talking improvingly to our mother and at us, and very severe some of her remarks were, and I don't believe that Mother liked them any better than we did.

The severest she ever made were I think



"There were twelve nice little black balls in my hand when Jem came back with the pill box." P. 11.

heightened in their severity by the idea that we were paying unusual attention, as we sat on the floor a little behind her one day. We were paying a great deal of attention, but it was not so much to Miss Martin as to a stock of woodlice which I had collected, and which I was arranging on the carpet that Jem might see how they roll them-

selves into smooth tight balls when you tease them. But at last she talked so that we could not help attending. I dared not say anything to her, but her own tactics were available. I put the woodlice back in my pocket, and stretching my arms yawningly above my head, I said to Jem, "How dull it is! I wish I were a bandit."

Jem generally outdid me if possible, from sheer willingness and loyalty of spirit.

"I should like to be a burglar," said he.

And then we both left the room very quietly and politely. When we got outside I said, "I hate that woman."

"So do I," said Jem; "she regularly hectors over mother—I hate her worst for that."

"So do I. Jem, doesn't she take pills?"

"I don't know—why?"

"I believe she does; I'm certain I saw a box on her dressing-table. Jem, run like a good chap and see, and if there is one, empty out the pills and bring me the pill-box."

Jem obeyed, and I sat down on the stairs and began to get the woodlice out again. There were twelve nice little black balls in my hand when Jem came back with the pill-box.

"Hooray!" I cried; "but knock out all the powder, it might smother them. Now, give it to me."

Jem danced with delight when I put the woodlice in and put on the lid.

"I hope she'll shake the box before she opens it," I said as we replaced it on the dressing-table.

"I hope she will, or they won't be tight. Oh, Jack! Jack! *How many do you suppose she takes at a time?*"

We never knew, and what is more, we never knew what became of the woodlice, for, for some reason, she kept our counsel as well as her own about the pill-box.

One thing that helped to reconcile us to spending a good share of our summer days in Walnut-tree Academy was that the schoolmistress made us very comfortable. Boys at our age are not very sensitive about matters of taste and colour and so forth, but even we discovered that Mrs. Wood had that knack of adapting rooms to their inhabitants, and making them pleasant to the eye, which seems to be a trick at the end of some people's fingers, and quite unlearnable by others. When she had made the old miser's rooms to her mind, we might have understood, if we had speculated about it, how it was that she had not profited by my mother's sound advice to send all his "rubbishy odds and ends" (the irregularity and ricketiness and dustiness of which made my mother shudder) to be "sold at the nearest auction-rooms, and buy some good solid furniture of the cabinet-maker who furnished for everybody in the neighbourhood, which would be the cheapest in the long-run, besides making the rooms look like other people's at last." That she evaded similar recommendations of paperhangers and upholsterers, and of wall-papers and carpets, and curtains with patterns that would "stand," and wear best, and show dirt

least, was a trifle in the eyes of all good house-keepers, when our farming-man's daughter brought the amazing news with her to Sunday tea, that "the missus" had had in old Sally, and had torn the paper off the parlour, and had made Sally "limewash the walls, for all the world as if it was a cellar." Moreover, she had "gone over" the lower part herself, and was now painting on the top of that. There was nothing for it, after this news, but to sigh and conclude that there was something about the old place which made everybody a little queer who came to live in it.

But when Jem and I saw the parlour (which was now the school-room), we decided that it "looked very nice," and was "uncommonly comfortable." The change was certainly amazing, and made the funeral day seem longer ago than it really was. The walls were not literally lime-washed; but (which is the same thing, except for a little glue!) they were distempered, a soft pale pea-green. About a yard deep above the wainscot this was covered with a dark sombre green tint, and along the upper edge of this, as a border all round the room, the schoolmistress had painted a trailing wreath of white periwinkle. The border was painted with the same materials as the walls, and with very rapid touches. The white flowers were skillfully relieved by the dark ground, and the varied tints of the leaves, from the deep evergreen of the old ones to the pale yellow of the young shoots, had demanded no new colours, and were wonderfully life-like and pretty. There was another border, right round the top of the room; but that was painted on paper and fastened on. It was a Bible text—"Keep Innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a man Peace at the last." And Mrs. Wood had done the text also.

There were no curtains to the broad, mullioned window, which was kept wide open at every latitude; and one long shoot of ivy that had pushed in farther than the rest had been seized, and pinned to the wall inside, where its growth was a subject of study and calculation, during the many moments when we were "trying to see" how little we could learn of our lessons. The black board stood on a polished easel; but the low seats and desks were of plain pine like the floor, and they were scrupulously scrubbed. The cool tint of the walls was somewhat cheered by coloured maps and prints, and the schoolmistress's chair (an old carved oak one that had been much revived by bees-wax and turpentine since the miser's days) stood on the left-hand side of the window—under "Keep Innocency," and looking towards "Peace at the last." I know, for when we were all writing or something of that sort, so that she could sit still,

she used to sit with her hands folded and look up at it, which was what made Jem and me think of the old white hen that turned up its eyes; and made Horace Simpson say that he believed she had done one of the letters wrong, and could not help looking at it to see if it showed. And by the schoolmistress's chair was the lame boy's sofa. It was the very old sofa covered with newspapers on which I had read about the murder, when the lawyer was reading the will. But she had taken off the paper, and covered it with turkey red, and red cushions, and a quilt of brown holland and red bordering, to hide his crumpled legs, so that he looked quite comfortable.

I remember so well the first day that he came. His father was a parson on the moors, and this boy had always wanted to go to school in spite of his infirmity, and at last his father brought him in a light cart down from the moors, to look at it; and when he got him out of the cart, he carried him in. He was a big man, I remember, with grey hair and bent shoulders, and a very old coat, for it split a little at one of the seams as he was carrying him in, and we laughed.

When they got into the room, he put the boy down, keeping his arm round him, and wiped his face and said—"How deliciously cool!"—and the boy stared all round with his great eyes, and then he lifted them to his father's face and said—"I'll come here. I do like it. But not to-day, my back is so bad."

And what makes me know that Horace was wrong, and that Mrs. Wood had made no mistake about the letters of the text, is that "Cripple Charlie"—as we called him—could see it so well with lying down. And he told me one day that when his back was very bad, and he got the fidgets and could not keep still, he used to fix his eyes on "Peace," which had gold round the letters, and shone, and that if he could keep steadily to it, for a good bit, he always fell asleep at the last. But he was very fanciful, poor chap!

I do not think it was because Jem and I had any real wish to become burglars that we made a raid on the walnuts that autumn. I do not even think that we cared very much about the walnuts themselves.

But when it is understood that the raid was to be a raid by night, or rather in those very early hours of the morning which real burglars are said almost to prefer; that it was necessary to provide ourselves with thick sticks; that we should have to force the hedge and climb the trees; that the said trees grew directly under the owner's bedroom window, which made the chances of detection hazardingly great; and that walnut juice (as I have mentioned before) is of a peculiarly unac-

commodating nature, since it will neither disguise you at the time nor wash off afterwards—it will be obvious that the dangers and delights of the adventure were sufficient to blunt, for the moment, our sense of the fact that we were deliberately going a-thieving.

"Shall we wear black masks?" said Jem.

On the whole I said "No," for I did not know where we should get them, nor, if we did, how we should keep them on.

"If she has a blunderbuss, and fires," said I, "you must duck your head, remember; but if she springs the rattle we must cut and run."

"Will her blunderbuss be loaded, do you think?" asked Jem. "Mother says the one in *their* room isn't; she told me so on Saturday. But she says we're never to touch it, all the same, for you never can be sure about things of that sort going off. Do you think Mrs. Wood's will be loaded?"

"It may be," said I, "and of course she might load it if she thought she heard robbers."

"I heard father say that if you shoot a burglar outside it's murder," said Jem, who seemed rather troubled by the thought of the blunderbuss; "but if you shoot him inside it's self-defence."

"Well, you may spring a rattle outside, anyway," said I; "and if hers makes as much noise as ours, it'll be heard all the way here. So mind, if she begins, you must jump down and cut home like mad."

Armed with these instructions and our thick sticks, Jem and I crept out of the house before the sun was up or a bird awake. The air seemed cold after our warm beds, and the dew was so drenching in the hedge bottoms, and on the wayside weeds of our favourite lane, that we were soaked to the knees before we began to force the hedge. I did not think that grass and wild flowers could have held so much wet. By the time that we had crossed the orchard, and I was preparing to grip the grandly scored trunk of the nearest walnut-tree with my chilly legs, the heavy peeling, the hard cracking, and the tedious picking of a green walnut was as little pleasurable a notion as I had in my brain.

All the same, I said (as firmly as my chattering teeth would allow) that I was very glad we had come when we did, for that there certainly were fewer walnuts on the tree than there had been the day before.

"She's been at them," said I, almost indignantly.

"Pickling," responded Jem with gloomy consciousness; and spurred by this discovery to fresh enthusiasm for our exploit, we promptly planned operations.

"I'll go up the tree," said I, "and beat, and you can pick them as they fall."

Jem was, I fear, only too well accustomed to my arrogating the first place in our joint undertakings, and after giving me "a leg up" to an available bit of foothold, and handing up my stick, he waited patiently below to gather what I beat down.

The walnuts were few and far between, to say nothing of leaves between, which in walnut-trees are large. The morning twilight was dim, my hands were cold and feeble than my resolution. I had battered down a lot of leaves and twigs, and two or three walnuts; the sun had got up at last, but rather slowly, as if he found the morning chillier than he expected, and a few rays were darting here and there across the lane, when Jem gave a warning "Hush!" and I left off rustling in time to hear Mrs. Wood's bedroom lattice opened, and to catch sight of something pushed out into the morning mists.

"Who's there?" said the schoolmistress.

Neither Jem nor I took upon us to inform her, and we were both seized with anxiety to know what was at the window. He was too low down and I too much buried in foliage to see clearly. Was it the rattle? I took a hasty step downwards at the thought. Or was it the blunderbuss? In my sudden move I slipped on the dew-damped branch, and cracked a rotten one with my elbow, which made an appalling crash in the early stillness, and sent a walnut—pop! on to Jem's hat, who had already ducked to avoid the fire of the blunderbuss, and now fell on his face under the fullest conviction that he had been shot.

"Who's there?" said the schoolmistress, and (my tumble having brought me into a more exposed position) she added, "Is that you, Jack and Jem?"

"It's me," said I, ungrammatically but stoutly, hoping that Jem at any rate would slip off.

But he had recovered himself and his loyalty, and unhesitatingly announced, "No, it's me," and was picking the bits of grass off his cheeks and knees when I got down beside him.

"I'm sorry you came to take my walnuts like this," said the voice from above. She had a particularly clear one, and we could hear it quite well. "I got a basketful on purpose for you yesterday afternoon. If I let it down by a string, do you think you can take it?"

Happily she did not wait for a reply, as we could not have got a word out between us; but by-and-by the basketful of walnuts was pushed through the lattice and began to descend. It came slowly and unsteadily, and we had abundant leisure to watch it, and also, as we looked up, to discover what it was that had so puzzled me in Mrs. Wood's appearance—that when I first dis-

covered that it was a head and not a blunderbuss at the window I had not recognised it for hers.

She was without her widow's cap, which revealed the fact that her hair, though the two narrow, smooth bands of it which appeared every day beyond her cap were unmistakably grey, was different in some essential respects from (say) Mrs. Jones's, our grey-haired washer-woman. The more you saw of Mrs. Jones's head, the less hair you perceived her to have, and the whiter that little appeared. Indeed, the knob into which it was twisted at the back was much of the colour as well as of the size of a tangled reel of dirty white cotton. But Mrs. Wood's hair was far more abundant than our mother's, and it was darker underneath than on the top—a fact which was more obvious when the knot into which it was gathered in her neck was no longer hidden. Deep brown streaks were mingled with the grey in the twists of this, and I could see them quite well, for the outline of her head was dark against the white-washed mullion of the window, and framed by ivy-leaves. As she leaned out to lower the basket we could see her better and better, and, as it touched the ground, the jerk pulled her forward, and the knot of her hair uncoiled and rolled heavily over the window-sill.

By this time the rays of the sun were level with the windows, and shone full upon Mrs. Wood's face. I was very much absorbed in looking at her, but I could not forget our peculiar position, and I had an important question to put, which I did without more ado.

"Please, madam, shall you tell Father?"

"We only want to know," added Jem.

She hesitated a minute, and then smiled. "No; I don't think you'll do it again;" after which she disappeared.

"She's certainly no sneak," said I, with an effort to be magnanimous, for I would much rather she had sprung the rattle or fired the blunderbuss.

"And I say," said Jem, "isn't she pretty without her cap?"

We looked ruefully at the walnuts. We had lost all appetite for them, and they seemed disgustingly damp, with their green coats reeking with black bruises. But we could not have left the basket behind, so we put our sticks through the handles, and carried it like the Sunday picture of the spies carrying the grapes of Eshcol.

And Jem and I have often since agreed that we never in all our lives felt so mean as on that occasion, and we sincerely hope that we never may.

Indeed, it is only in some books and some sermons that people are divided into "the wicked" and "the good," and that "the wicked" have no

consciences at all. Jem and I had wilfully gone thieving, but we were far from being utterly hardened, and the schoolmistress's generosity weighed heavily upon ours. Repentance and the desire to make atonement seem to go pretty naturally together, and in my case they led to the following dialogue with Jem, on the subject of two exquisite little bantam hens and a cock, which were our joint property, and which were known in the farmyard as "the Major and his wives."

These titles (which vexed my dear mother from the first) had suggested themselves to us on this wise. There was a certain little gentleman who came to our church, a brewer by profession, and a major in the militia by choice, who was so small and strutted so much that to the insolent observation of boyhood he was "exactly like" our new bantam cock. Young people are very apt to overhear what is not intended for their knowledge, and somehow or other we learned that he was "court-ing" (as his third wife) a lady of our parish. His former wives are buried in our churchyard. Over the first he had raised an obelisk of marble, so costly and affectionate that it had won the hearts of his neighbours in general, and of his second wife in particular. When she died the gossips wondered whether the Major would add her name to that of her predecessor, or "go to the expense" of a new monument. He erected a second obelisk, and it was taller than the first (height had a curious fascination for him), and the inscription was more touching than the other. This time the material was Aberdeen granite, and as that is most difficult to cut, hard to polish, and heavy to transport, the expense was enormous. These two monstrosities of mortuary pomp were the pride of the parish, and they were familiarly known to us children (and to many other people) as "the Major's wives."

When we called the cock "the Major," we naturally called the hens "the Major's wives."

"My dears, I don't like that name at all," said my mother. "I never like jokes about people who are dead. And for that matter, it really sounds as if they were both alive, which is worse."

It was during our naughty period, and I strutted on my heels till I must have looked very like the little brewer himself, and said, "And why shouldn't they both be alive? Fancy the Major with two wives, one on each arm, and both as tall as the monuments! What fun!"

As I said the words "one on each arm," I put up first one and then the other of my own, and having got a satisfactory impetus during the rest of my sentence, I crossed the parlour as a catharine-wheel under my mother's nose. It was a new accomplishment, of which I was very proud, and

poor Jem somewhat envious. He was clumsy and could not manage it.

"Oh!" ejaculated my mother, "Jack, I must speak to your father about those dangerous tricks of yours. And it quite shocks me to hear you talk in that light way about wicked things."

Jem was to my rescue in a moment, driving his hands into the pockets of his blouse, and turning them up to see how soon he might hope that his fingers would burst through the lining.

"Jacob had two wives," he said; and he chanted on, quoting imperfectly from Dr. Watts's "Scripture Catechism." "And Jacob was a good man, therefore his brother hated him."

"No, no, Jem," said I, "that was Abel. Jacob was Isaac's younger son, and——"

"Hush! Hush! Hush!" said my mother. "You're not to do Sunday lessons on weekdays. What terrible boys you are!" And, avoiding to fight about Jacob's wives with Jem, who was pertinacious and said very odd things, my mother did what women often do and are often wise in doing—she laid down her weapons and began to beseech.

"My darlings, call your nice little hens some other names. Poor old mother doesn't like those."

I was melted in an instant, and began to cast about in my head for new titles. But Jem was softly obstinate, and he had inherited some of my mother's wheedling ways. He took his hands from his pockets, flung his arms recklessly round her clean collar, and began stroking (or *pooring*, as we called it) her head with his grubby paws. And as he *poored* he coaxed—"Dear nice old mammy! It's only us. What can it matter? Do let us call our bantams what we like."

And my mother gave in before I had time to.

The dialogue I held with Jem about the bantams after the walnut raid was as follows:—

"Jem, you're awfully fond of the 'Major and his wives,' I suppose?"

"Ye-es," said Jem, "*I am*. But I don't mind, Jack, if you want them for your very own. I'll give up my share,"—and he sighed.

"I never saw such a good chap as you are, Jem. But it's not that. I thought we might give them to Mrs. Wood. It was so beastly about those disgusting walnuts."

"I can't touch walnut pickle now," said Jem, feelingly.

"It'd be a very handsome present," said I.

"They took a prize at the Agricultural," said Jem.

"I know she likes eggs. She beats 'em into a froth and feeds Charlie with 'em," said I.

"I think I could eat walnut pickle again if I knew she had the bantams," sighed Jem, who was

really devoted to the little cock-major and the auburn-feathered hens.

"We'll take 'em this afternoon," I said.

We did so—in a basket, Eshcol-grape-wise, like the walnuts. When we told mother, she made no objection. She would have given her own head off her shoulders if, by ill-luck, any passer-by had thought of asking for it. Besides, it solved the difficulty of the objectionable names.

Mrs. Wood was very loth to take our bantams, but of course Jem and I were not going to recall a gift, so she took them at last, and I think she was very much pleased with them.

She had got her cap on again, tied under her chin, and nothing to be seen of her hair but the very grey piece in front. It made her look so different that I could not keep my eyes off her whilst she was talking, though I knew quite well how rude it is to stare. And my head got so full of it that I said at last, in spite of myself, "Please, madam, why is it that part of your hair is grey and part of it dark?"

Her face got rather red, she did not answer for a minute; and Jem, to my great relief, changed the subject, by saying, "We were very much obliged to you for not telling Father about the walnuts."

Mrs. Wood leaned back against the high carving of her old chair and smiled, and said very slowly, "Would he have been very angry?"

"He'd have flogged us, I expect," said I.

"And I expect," continued Jem, "that he'd have said to us what he said to Bob Furniss when he took the filberts: 'If you begin by stealing nuts, you'll end by being transported.' Do you think Jack and I shall end by being transported?" added Jem, who had a merciless talent for applying general principles to individual cases.

Mrs. Wood made no reply, neither did she move, but her eyelids fell, and then her eyes looked far worse than if they had been shut, for there was a little bit open, with nothing but white to be seen. She was still rather red, and she did not visibly breathe. I have no idea for how many seconds I had gazed stupidly at her, when Jem gasped, "Is she dead?"

Then I became terror-struck, and crying, "Let's find Mary Anne!" fled into the kitchen, closely followed by Jem.

"She's took with them fits occasional," said Mary Anne, and depositing a dripping tin she ran to the parlour. We followed in time to see her stooping over the chair and speaking very loudly in the schoolmistress's ear—

"I'll lay ye down, ma'am, shall I?"

But still the widow was silent, on which Mary Anne took her up in her brawny arms, and laid

her on "Cripple Charlie's" sofa, and covered her with the quilt.

We settled the Major and his wives into their new abode, and then hurried home to my mother, who put on her bonnet, and took a bottle of something, and went off to the farm.

She did not come back till tea-time, and then she was full of poor Mrs. Wood. "Most curious attacks," she explained to my father; "she can neither move nor speak, and yet she hears everything, though she doesn't always remember afterwards. She said she thought it was 'trouble,' poor soul!"

"What brought this one on?" said my father.

"I can't make out," said my mother. "I hope you boys did nothing to frighten her, eh? Are you sure you didn't do one of those dreadful wheels, Jack?"

This I indignantly denied, and Jem supported me.

My mother's sympathy had been so deeply enlisted, and her report was so detailed, that Jem and I became bored at last, besides resenting the notion that we had been to blame. I gave one look into the strawberry jam pot, and finding it empty, said my grace and added, "Women are a poor lot, always turning up their eyes and having fits about nothing. I know one thing, nobody'll ever catch me being bothered with a wife."

"Nor me neither," said Jem.

CHAPTER IV.

"The bee, a more adventurous colonist than man."

W. C. Bryant.

"Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey;
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from to-day."

Wordsworth.

"YOU know what an Apiary is, Isaac, of course."

I was sitting in the bee-master's cottage, opposite to him, in an arm-chair, which was the counterpart of his own, both of them having circular backs, diamond-shaped seats, and chintz cushions with frills. It was the summer following that in which Jem and I had tried to see how badly we could behave; this uncivilised phase had abated: Jem used to ride about a great deal with my father, and I had become intimate with Isaac Irvine.

"You know what an Apiary is, Isaac?" said I.

"A what, sir?"

"An A-P-I-A-R-Y."

"To be sure, sir, to be sure," said Isaac. "An *appyary*" (so he was pleased to pronounce it), "I

should be familiar with the name, sir, from my bee-book, but I never calls my own stock anything but the beehives. *Beehives* is a good straightforward sort of a name, sir, and it serves my turn."

"Ah, but you see we haven't come to the B's yet," said I, alluding to what I was thinking of.

"Does your father think of keeping 'em, sir?" said Isaac, alluding to what he was thinking of.

"Oh, he means to have them bound, I believe," was my reply.

"The bee-master now betrayed his bewilderment, and we had a hearty laugh when we discovered that he had been talking about bees whilst I had been talking about the weekly numbers of the "Penny Cyclopædia," which had not as yet reached the letter B, but in which I had found an article on Master Isaac's craft, under the word *Apiary*, which had greatly interested me, and ought, I thought, to be interesting to the bee-keeper. Still thinking of this I said—

"Do you ever take your bees away from home, Isaac?"

"They're on the moors now, sir," said Isaac.

"Are they?" I exclaimed. "Then you're like the Egyptians, and like the French, and the Piedmontese; only you didn't take them in a barge."

"Why, no, sir. The canal don't go nigh-hand of the moors at all."

"The Egyptians," said I, leaning back into the capacious arms of my chair, and epitomising what I had read, "who live in Lower Egypt put all their beehives into boats and take them on the river to Upper Egypt. Right up at that end of the Nile the flowers come out earliest, and the bees get all the good out of them there, and then the boats are moved lower down to where the same kind of flowers are only just beginning to blossom, and the bees get all the good out of them there, and so on, and on, and on, till they've travelled right through Egypt, with all the hives piled up, and come back in the boats to where they started from."

"And every hive a mighty different weight to what it was when they did start, I'll warrant," said Master Isaac enthusiastically. "Did you find all that in those penny numbers, Master Jack?"

"Yes, and oh, lots more, Isaac! About lots of things and lots of countries."

"Scholarship's a fine thing," said the bee-master, "and seeing foreign parts is a fine thing, and many's the time I've wished for both. I suppose that's the same Egypt that's in the Bible, sir?"

"Yes," said I, "and the same river Nile that Moses was put on in the ark of bulrushes."

"There's no countries I'd like to see better than them Bible countries," said Master Isaac, "and

I've wished it more ever since that gentleman was here that gave that lecture in the school, with the Holy Land magic-lantern. He'd been there himself, and he explained all the slides. They were grand, some of 'em, when you got 'em straight and steady for a bit. They're an awkward thing to manage, is slides, sir, and the schoolmaster he wasn't much good at 'em, he said, and that young scoundrel Bob Furniss and another lad got in a hole below the platform and pulled the sheet. But when you did get 'em, right side up, and the light as it should be, they were grand! There was one they called the Wailing Place of the Jews, with every stone standing out as fair as the flags on this floor. John Binder, the mason, was at my elbow when that came on, and he clapped his hands, and says he, 'Well, yon beats all!' But the one for my choice, sir, was the Garden of Gethsemane by moonlight. I'd only gone to the penny places, for I'm a good size and can look over most folks' heads, but I thought I must see that a bit nearer, cost what it might. So I found a shilling, and I says to the young fellow at the door (it was the pupil-teacher), 'I must go a bit nearer to yon.' And he says, 'You're not going into the reserved seats, Isaac?' So I says, 'Don't put yourself about, my lad, I shan't interfere with the quality; but if half a day's wage'll bring me nearer to the Garden of Gethsemane, I'm bound to go.' And I went. I didn't intrude myself on nobody, though one gentleman was for making room for me at once, and twice over he offered me a seat beside him. But I knew my manners, and I said, 'Thank you, sir, I can see as I stand.' And I did see right well, and kicked Bob Furniss too, which was good for all parties. But I'd like to see the very places, themselves, Master Jack."

"So should I," said I; "but I should like to go farther, all round the world, I think. Do you know, Isaac, you wouldn't believe what curious beasts there are in other countries, and what wonderful people and places! Why, we've only got to ATH—No. 135—now; it leaves off at *Athana-gilde*, a captain of the Spanish Goths—he's nobody, but there are *such* apes in that number! The Mono—there's a picture of him, just like a man with a tail and horrid feet, who used to sit with the negro women when they were at work, and play with bits of paper; and a Quata, who used to be sent to the tavern for wine, and when the children pelted him he put down the wine and threw stones at them. And there are pictures in all the numbers, of birds and ant-eaters and antelopes, and I don't know what. The Mono and the Quata live in the West Indies, I think. You see, I think the A's are rather good numbers; very likely, for there's America, and Asia, and Africa,

and Arabia, and Abyssinia, and there'll be Australia before we come to the B's. Oh, Isaac! I do wish I could go round the world!"

I sighed, and the bee-master sighed also, with a profundity that made his chair creak, well-seasoned as it was. Then he said, "But I'll say this, Master Jack, next to going to such places the reading about 'em must come. A penny a week's a penny a week to a poor man, but I reckon I shall have to make shift to take in those numbers myself."

Isaac did not take them in, however, for I used to take ours down to his cottage, and read them aloud to him instead. He liked this much better than if he had had to read to himself—he said he could understand reading better when he heard it than when he saw it. For my own part I enjoyed it very much, and I fancy I read rather well, it being a point on which Mrs. Wood expended much trouble with us.

"Listen, Isaac," said I on my next visit; "this is what I meant about the barge"—and resting the Penny Number on the arm of my chair, I read aloud to the attentive bee-master—"Goldsmith describes from his own observation a kind of floating apiary in some parts of France and Piedmont. They have on board of one barge, he says, three-score or a hundred beehives—"

"That's an appy-ary if ye like, sir!" ejaculated Master Isaac, interrupting his pipe and me to make way for the observation.

"Somebody saw 'a convoy of four thousand hives—' on the Nile," said I.

The bee-master gave a resigned sigh. "Go on, Master Jack," said he.

"—well defended from the inclemency of an accidental storm," I proceeded; "'and with these the owners float quietly down the stream; one beehive yields the proprietor a considerable income. Why, he adds, a method sirilar to this has never been adopted in England, where we have more gentle rivers and more flowery banks than in any other part of the world, I know not; certainly it might be turned to advantage, and yield the possessor a secure, though perhaps a moderate, income.'"

I was very fond of the canal which ran near us (and was, for that matter, a parish boundary): and the barges, with their cargoes, were always interesting to me; but a bargeful of bees seemed something quite out of the common. I thought I should rather like to float down a gentle river between flowery banks, surrounded by beehives on which I could rely to furnish me with a secure though moderate income; and I said so.

"So should I, sir," said the bee-master. "And I should uncommon like to ha' seen the one bee-

hive that brought in a considerable income. Honey must have been very dear in those parts, Master Jack. However, it's in the book, so I suppose it's right enough."

I made no defence of the veracity of the "Cyclopædia," for I was thinking of something else, of which, after a few moments, I spoke.

"Isaac, you don't stay with your bees on the moors. Do you ever go to see them?"

"To be sure I do, Master Jack, nigh every Sunday through the season. I start after I get back from morning church, and I come home in the dark, or by moonlight. My missus goes to church in the afternoons, and for that bit she locks up the house."

"Oh, I sure you'd take me the next time!" said I.

"To be sure I will, and too glad sir, if you're allowed to go."

That was the difficulty, and I knew it. No one who has not lived in a household of old-fashioned middle-class country folk of our type has any notion how difficult it is for anybody to do anything unusual therein. In such a well-fitted but unelastic establishment the dinner-hour, the carriage horses, hot water, bedtime, candles, the post, the wash-day, and an extra blanket, from being the ministers of one's comfort, become the stern arbiters of one's fate. Spring cleaning—which is something like what it would be to build, paint, and furnish a house, and to "do it at home"—takes place as naturally as the season it celebrates; but if you want the front door kept open after the usual hour for drawing the bolts and hanging the robbers' bell, it's odds if the master of the house has not an apoplectic fit, and if servants of twelve and fourteen years' standing do not give warning.

And what is difficult on weekdays is on Sundays next door to impossible, for obvious reasons.

But one's parents, though they have their little ways like other people, are, as a rule—oh, my heart! made sadder and wiser by the world's rough experiences, bear witness!—very indulgent; and after a good many ups and downs, and some compromising and coaxing, I got my way.

On one point my mother was firm, and I feared this would be an insuperable difficulty. I must go twice to church, as our Sunday custom was—a custom which she saw no good reason for me to break. It is easy to smile at her punctiliousness on this score; but after all these years, and on the whole, I think she was right. An unexpected compromise came to my rescue, however: Isaac Irvine's bees were in the parish of Cripple Charlie's father, within a stone's throw (by the bee-master's strong arm) of the church itself, which was a small minster among the moors. Here I promised faith-

fully to attend evening prayer, for which we should be in time; and I started, by Isaac Irvine's side, on my first real "expedition" on the first Sunday in August, with my mother's blessing and a three-penny-bit with a hole in it, "in case of a collection."

We dined before we started, I with the rest, and Isaac in our kitchen; but I had no great appetite—I was too much excited—and I willingly accepted some large sandwiches made with thick slices of home-made bread and liberal layers of home-made potted meat, "in case I should feel hungry" before I got there.

It pains me to think how distressed my mother was because I insisted on carrying the sandwiches in a red and orange spotted handkerchief, which I had purchased with my own pocket-money, and to which I was deeply attached, partly from the bombastic nature of the pattern, and partly because it was big enough for any grown-up man. "It made me look like a tramping sailor," she said. I did not tell her that this was precisely the effect at which I aimed, though it was the case; but I coaxed her into permitting it, and I abstained from passing a certain knowing little ash stick through the knot, and hoisting the bundle over my left shoulder, till I was well out of the grounds.

My efforts to spare her feelings on this point, however, proved vain. She ran to the landing-window to watch me out of sight, and had a full view of my figure as I swaggered with a business-like gait by Isaac's side up the first long hill, having set my hat on the back of my head with an affectation of profuse heat, my right hand in the bee-master's coat-pocket for support, and my left holding the stick and bundle at an angle as showy and sailor-like as I could assume.

"And they'll just meet the Ebenezer folk coming out of chapel, ma'am!" said our housemaid over my mother's shoulder, by way of consolation.

Our journey was up-hill, for which I was quite prepared. The blue and purple outline of the moors formed the horizon line visible from our gardens, whose mistiness or clearness was prophetic of the coming weather, and over which the wind was supposed to blow with uncommon "healthfulness." I had been there once to blow away the whooping-cough, and I could remember that the sandy road wound up and up, but I did not appreciate till that Sunday how tiring a steady ascent of nearly five miles may be.

We were within sight of the church and within hearing of the bells, when we reached a wayside trough, whose brimming measure was for ever overflowed by as bright a rill as ever trickled down a hill-side.

"It's only the first peal," said Master Isaac,

seating himself on the sandy bank, and wiping his brows.

My well-accustomed ears confirmed his statement. The bells moved too slowly for either the second or the third peal, and we had twenty minutes at our disposal.

It was then that I knew (for the first but not the last time) what refreshment for the weary a spotted handkerchief may hold. The bee-master and I divided the sandwiches, and washed them down with handfuls of the running rill, so fresh, so cold, so limpid, that (like the saints and martyrs of a faith) it would convert any one to water-drinking who did not reflect on the commoner and less shining streams which come to us through lead pipes and in evil communication with sewers.

We were cool and tidy by the time that the little "Tom Tinkler" bell began to "hurry up."

"You're coming, aren't you?" said I, checked at the churchyard gate by an instinct of some hesitation on Isaac's part.

"Well, I suppose I am, sir," said the bee-master, and in he came.

The thick walls, the stained windows, and the stone floor, which was below the level of the churchyard, made the church very cool. Master Isaac and I seated ourselves so that we had a good view within and could also catch a peep through the open porch of the sunlit country outside. Charlie's father was in his place when we got in; his threadbare coat was covered by the white linen of his office, and I do not think it would have been possible even to my levity to have felt anything but a respectful awe of him in church.

The cares of this life are not as a rule improving to the countenance. No one who watches faces can have failed to observe that more beauty is marred and youth curtailed by vulgar worry than by almost any other disfigurement. In the less educated classes, where self-control is not very habitual, and where interests beyond petty and personal ones are rare, the soft brows and tender lips of girlhood are too often puckered and hardened by mean anxieties, even where these do not affect the girls personally, but only imitatively, and as the daily interests of their station in life. In such cases the discontented, careworn look is by no means a certain indication of corresponding suffering, but there are too many others in which tempers that should have been generous, and faces that should have been noble, and aims that should have been high, are blurred and blunted by the real weight of real everyday care.

There are yet others; in which the spirit is too strong for mortal accidents to pull it down—minds that the narrowest career cannot vulgarise—faces to which care but adds a look of pathos—souls

which keep their aims and faiths apart from the fluctuations of "the things that are seen." The personal influence of natures of this type is generally very large, and it was very large in the case of Cripple Charlie's father, and made him a sort of Prophet, Priest, and King over a rough and scattered population, with whom the shy, scholarly poorgentleman had not otherwise much in common.

It was his personal influence, I am sure, which made the congregation so devout! There is one rule which, I believe, applies to all congregations, of every denomination, and any kind of ritual, and that is, that the enthusiasm of the congregation is in direct proportion to the enthusiasm of the minister; not merely to his personal worth, nor even to his popularity, for people who rather dislike a clergyman, and disapprove of his service, will say a louder Amen at his giving of thanks if his own feelings have a touch of fire, than they would to that of a more perfunctory parson whom they liked better. As is the heartiness of the priest, so is the heartiness of the people—with such strictness that one is disposed almost to credit some of it to actual magnetism. *Response* is no empty word in public worship.

It was no empty word on this occasion. From the ancient clerk (who kept a life-interest in what were now the duties of a choir) to some gaping farm-lads at my back, everybody said and sang to the utmost of his ability. I may add that Isaac and I involuntarily displayed a zeal which was in excess of our Sunday customs; and if my tongue moved glibly enough with the choir, the bee-master found many an elderly parishioner besides himself and the clerk who "took" both prayer and praise at such independent paces as suited their individual scholarship, spectacles, and notions of reverence.

It crowned my satisfaction when I found that there was to be a collection. The hymn to which the churchwardens moved about, gathering the pence, whose numbers and noisiness seemed in keeping with the rest of the service, was a well-known one to us all. It was the favourite evening hymn of the district. I knew every syllable of it, for Jem and I always sang hymns (and invariably this one) with my dear mother, on Sunday evening after supper. When we were good, we liked it, and, picking one favourite after another, we often sang nearly through the hymn-book. When we were naughty, we displayed a good deal of skill in making derisive faces behind my mother's back, as she sat at the piano, without betraying ourselves, and in getting our tongues out and in again during the natural pauses and convolutions of the tune. But these occasional fits of boyish profanity did not hinder me from having an equally boyish fund

of reverence and enthusiasm at the bottom of my heart, and it was with proud and pleasurable emotions that I heard the old clerk give forth the familiar first lines—

"Soon shall the evening star with silver ray
Shed its mild lustre o'er this sacred day,"

and got my threepenny-bit ready between my finger and thumb.

Away went the organ, which was played by the vicar's eldest daughter—away went the vicar's second daughter, who "led the singing" from the vicarage pew with a voice like a bird—away went the choir, which, in spite of surplices, could not be cured of waiting half a beat for her—and away went the congregation—young men and maidens, old men and children—in one broad tide of somewhat irregular harmony. Isaac did not know the words as well as I did, so I lent him my hymn-book; one result of which was, that the print being small, and the sense of a hymn being in his view a far more important matter than the sound of it, he preached rather than sang—in an unequal cadence which was perturbing to my more musical ear—the familiar lines—

"Still let each awful truth our thoughts engage,
That shines revealed on inspiration's page;
Nor those blest hours in vain amusement waste
Which all who lavish shall lament at last."

During the next verse my devotions were a little distracted by the gradual approach of a churchwarden for my threepenny-bit, which was hot with three verses of expectant fingering. Then, to my relief, he took it, and the bee-master's contribution, and I felt calmer, and listened to the little prelude which it was always the custom for the organist to play before the final verse of a hymn. It was also the custom to sing the last verse as loudly as possible, though this is by no means invariably appropriate. It fitted the present occasion fairly enough. From where I stood I could see the bellows-blower (the magnetic current of enthusiasm flowed even to the back of the organ) nerve himself to prodigious pumping—Charlie's sister drew out all the stops—the vicar passed from the prayer-desk to the pulpit with the rapt look of a man who walks in a prophetic dream—we pulled ourselves together, Master Isaac brought the hymn-book close to his glasses, and when the tantalising prelude was past we burst forth with a volume which merged all discrepancies. As far as I am able to judge of my own performance, I fear I *bawled* (I'm sure the boy behind me did)—

"Father of Heaven; in Whom our hopes confide,
Whose power defends us, and Whose precepts guide,
In life our Guardian, and in death our Friend,
Glory supreme be Thine till time shall end!"

The sermon was short, and when the service was over Master Isaac and I spent a delightful afternoon with his bees among the heather. The "evening star" had come out when we had some tea in the village inn, and we walked home by moonlight. There was neither wind nor sun, but the air was almost oppressively pure. The moonshine had taken the colour out of the sandy road and the heather, and had painted black shadows by every boulder, and most things looked asleep except the rill that went on running. Only we and the rabbits, and the night moths and the beetles, seemed to be stirring. An occasional bat appeared and vanished like a spectral illusion, and I saw one owl flap across the moor with level wings against the moon.

"Oh, I *have* enjoyed it!" was all I could say when I parted from the bee-master.

"And so have I, Master Jack," was his reply, and he hesitated as if he had something more to say, and then he said it. "I never enjoyed it as much, and you can thank your mother, sir, with old Isaac's duty, for sending us to church. I'm sure I don't know why I never went before when I was up yonder, for I always took notice of the bells. I reckon I thought I hadn't time, but you can say, with my respects, sir, that please GOD I shan't miss again."

I believe he never did; and "Cripple Charlie's" father came to look on him as half a parishioner.

I was glad I had not shirked Evening Prayer myself, though (my sex and age considered) it was not to be expected that I should comfort my mother's heart by confessing as much. Let me confess it now, and confess also that if it was the first time, it was not the last that I have had cause to realise—oh women, for our sakes remember it!—into what light and gentle hands GOD lays the reins that guide men's better selves.

The most remarkable event of the day happened at the end of it. Whilst Isaac was feeling the weight of one of his hives, and just after I lost chase of a very peculiar-looking beetle, from his squeezing himself away from me under a boulder, I had caught sight of a bit of white heather, and then bethought me of gathering a nosegay (to include this rarity) of moor flowers and grasses for Mrs. Wood. So when we reached the lane on our way home, I bade Isaac good-night, and said I would just run in by the back way into the farm (we never called it the Academy) and leave the flowers, that the schoolmistress might put them in water. Mary Ann was in the kitchen.

"Where's Mrs. Wood?" said I, when she had got over that silly squeak women always give when you come suddenly on them.

"Dear, dear, Master Jack! what a turn you did give me! I thought it was the tramp."

"What tramp?" said I.

"Why, a great lanky man that came skulking here a bit since, and asked for the missus. She was down the garden, and I've half a notion he went after her. I wish you'd go and look for her, Master Jack, and fetch her in. It's as damp as dear knows what, and she takes no more care of herself than a baby. And I'd be glad to know that man was off the place. There's wall-fruit and lots of things about, a low fellow like that might pick up."

My ears felt a little hot at this allusion to low fellows and garden thieving, and I hurried off to do Mary Ann's bidding without further parley. There was a cloud over the moon as I ran down the back garden, but when I was nearly at the end the moon burst forth again, so that I could see. And this is what I saw:—

First, a white thing lying on the ground, and it was the widow's cap, and then Mrs. Wood herself, with a gaunt lanky-looking man, such as Mary Ann had described. Her head came nearly to his shoulder, as I was well able to judge, for he was holding it in his hands and had laid his own upon it, as if it were a natural resting-place. And his hair coming against the darker part of hers, I could see that his was grey all over. Up to this point I had been too much stupefied to move, and I had just become conscious that I ought to go, when the white cap lying in the moonlight seemed to catch his eye as it had caught mine; and he set his heel on it with a vehemence that made me anxious to be off. I could not resist one look back as I left the garden, if only to make sure that I had not been dreaming. No, they were there still, and he was lifting the coil of her hair, which I suppose had come down when the cap was pulled off, and it took the full stretch of his arm to do so, before it fell heavily from his fingers.

When I presented myself to my mother with the bunch of flowers still in my hand, she said, "Did my Jack get these for mother?"

I shook my head. "No, mother. For Mrs. Wood."

"You might have called at the farm as you passed," said she.

"I did!" said I.

"Couldn't you see Mrs. Wood, love?"

"Yes, I saw her, but she'd got the tramp with her."

"What tramp?" asked my mother in a horror-struck voice, which seemed quite natural to me, for I had been brought up to rank tramps in the same "dangerous class" with mad dogs, stray bulls, drunken men, and other things which it is undesirable to meet.

"The great lanky one," I explained, quoting from Mary Ann.

"What was he doing with Mrs. Wood?" asked my mother anxiously.

I had not yet recovered from my own bewilderment, and was reckless of the shock inflicted by my reply.

"*Pooring her head, and kissing it.*"

CHAPTER V.

"To each his sufferings; all are men
Condemned alike to groan.
The tender for another's pain—" *Gray.*

NOT even the miser's funeral had produced in the neighbourhood anything like the excitement which followed that Sunday evening. At first my mother—her mind filled by the simplest form of the problem, namely, that Mrs. Wood was in the hands of a tramp—wished my father to take the blunderbuss in his hand and step down to the farm. He had "pish"ed and "psha"ed about the blunderbuss, and was beginning to say more, when I was dismissed to bed, where I wandered back over the moors in uneasy dreams, and woke with the horror of a tramp's hand upon my shoulder. After suffering the terrors of night for some time, and finding myself no braver with my head under the bedclothes than above them, I began conscientiously to try my mother's family recipe for "bad dreams and being afraid in the dark." This was to "say over" the Benedicite correctly, which (if by a rare chance one were still awake at the end) was to be followed by a succession of the hymns one knew by heart. It required an effort to *begin*, and to *really try*, but the children of such mothers as ours are taught to make efforts, and once fairly started, and holding on as a duty, it certainly did tend to divert the mind from burglars and ghosts, to get the beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air into their right places in the chorus of benedictions. That Jem never could discriminate between the "Dews and Frosts" and "Frost and Cold" verses needs no telling. I have often finished and still been frightened and had to fall back upon the hymns, but this night I began to dream pleasanter dreams of Charlie's father and the bee-master before I got to the holy and humble men of heart.

I slept long then, and Mother would not let me be awakened. When I did open my eyes Jem was sitting at the end of my bed, dying to tell me the news.

"Jack! you have waked, haven't you? I see your eyes. Don't shut 'em again. What do you think? *Mrs. Wood's husband has come home!*"

I never knew the ins and outs of the story very exactly. At the time that what did become generally known was fresh in people's minds Jem and I were not by way of being admitted to "grown-up" conversations; and though Mrs. Wood's husband and I became intimate friends, I neither wished nor dared to ask him more about his past than he chose to tell, for I knew enough to know that it must be almost intolerable pain to recall it.

What we had all heard of the story was this. Mr. Wood had been a head clerk in a house of business. A great forgery was committed against his employers, and he was accused. He was tried, condemned, and sentenced to fourteen years' penal servitude, which, in those days, meant transportation abroad. For some little time the jury had not been unanimous. One man doubted the prisoner's guilt—the man we afterwards knew as the old miser of Walnut-tree Farm. But he was over-persuaded at last, and Mr. Wood was convicted and sentenced. He had spent ten years of his penal servitude in Bermuda when a man lying in Maidstone Jail under sentence of death for murder, confessed (amongst other crimes of which he disburdened his conscience), that it was he, and not the man who had been condemned, who had committed the forgery. Investigation confirmed the truth of this statement, and Mr. Wood was "pardoned" and brought home.

He had just come. He was the tramp.

In this life the old miser never knew that his first judgment had been the just one, but the doubt which seems always to have haunted him—whether he had not helped to condemn the innocent—was the reason of his bequest to the convict's wife, and explained much of the mysterious wording of the will.

It was a tragic tale, and gave a terrible interest to the gaunt, white-haired, shattered-looking man who was the hero of it. It had one point of special awe for me, and I used to watch him in church and think of it, till I am ashamed to say that I forgot even when to stand up and sit down. He had served ten years of his sentence. Ten years! Ten times three hundred and sixty-five days! All the days of the years of my life. The weight of that undeserved punishment had fallen on him the year that I was born, and all that long, long time of home with Mother and Father and Jem—all the haymaking summers and snowballing winters—whilst Jem and I had never been away from home, and had had so much fun, and nothing very horrid that I could call to mind except the mumps—he had been an exile working in chains. I remember

rousing up with a start from the realisation of this one Sunday to find myself still standing in the middle of the Litany. My mother was behaving too well herself to find me out, and though Jem was giggling he dared not move, because he was kneeling next my father, whose back was turned to me. I knelt down, and started to hear the parson say—"show Thy pity upon all prisoners and captives!" And then I knew what it is to wish when it is too late. For I did so wish I had really prayed for prisoners and captives every Sunday, because then I should have prayed for that poor man nearly all the long time he had been so miserable; for we began to go to church very early, and one learns to pray easier and sooner than one learns anything else.

All this had happened in the holidays, but when they were over school opened as before, and with additional scholars; for sympathy was wide and warm with the schoolmistress. Strangely enough, both partners in the firm which had prosecuted Mr. Wood were dead. Their successors offered him employment, but he could not face the old associations. I believe he found it so hard to face any one, that this was the reason of his staying at home for a time and helping in the school. I don't think we boys made him uncomfortable as grown-up strangers seemed to do, and he was particularly fond of "Cripple Charlie."

This brought me into contact with him, for Charlie and I were great friends. He was as well pleased to be read to out of the penny numbers as the bee-master, and he was interested in things of which Isaac Irvine was completely ignorant.

Our school was a day-school, but Charlie had been received by Mrs. Wood as a boarder. His poor back could not have borne to be jolted to and from the moors every day. So he lived at Walnut-tree Farm, and now and then his father would come down in a light cart, lent by one of the parishioners, and take Charlie home from Saturday to Monday, and then bring him back again.

The sisters came to see him too, by turns, sometimes walking and sometimes riding a rough-coated pony, who was well-content to be tied to a gate, and eat some of the grass that overgrew the lane. And often Charlie came to us, especially in haytime, for haycocks seem very comfortable (for people whose backs hurt) to lean against; and we could cover his legs with hay too, as he liked them to be hidden. There is no need to say how tender my mother was to him, and my father used to look at him half puzzledly and half pitifully, and always spoke to him in quite a different tone of voice to the one he used with other boys.

Jem gave Charlie the best puppy out of the

curly brown spaniel lot; but he didn't really like being with him, though he was sorry for him, and he could not bear seeing his poor legs.

"They make me feel horrid," Jem said. "And even when they're covered up, I know they're there."

"You're a chip of the old block, Jem," said my father. "I'd give a guinea to a hospital any day sooner than see a patient. I'm as sorry as can be for the poor lad, but he turns me queer, though I feel ashamed of it. I like things *sound*. Your mother's different; she likes 'em better for being sick and sorry, and I suppose Jack takes after her."

My father was wrong about me. Pity for Charlie was not half of the tie between us. When he was talking, or listening to the penny numbers, I never thought about his legs or his back, and I don't now understand how anybody could.

He read and remembered far more than I did, and he was even wilder about strange countries. He had as adventurous a spirit as any lad in the school, cramped up as it was in that misshapen body. I knew he'd have liked to go round the world as well as I, and he often laughed and said—"What's more, Jack, if I'd the money I would. People are very kind to poor wretches like me all over the world. I should never want a helping hand, and the only difference between us would be, that I should be carried on board-ship by some kindhearted blue-jacket, and you'd have to scramble for yourself."

He was very anxious to know Isaac Irvine, and when I brought the bee-master to see him, they seemed to hold friendly converse with their looks even before either of them spoke. It was a bad day with Charlie, but he set his lips against the pain, and raised himself on one arm to stare out of his big brown eyes at the old man, who met them with as steady a gaze out of his. Then Charlie lowered himself again, and said in a tone of voice by which I knew he was pleased, "I'm so glad you've come to see me, old Isaac. It's very kind of you. Jack says you know a lot about live things, and that you like the numbers we like in the 'Penny Cyclopædia.' I wanted to see you, for I think you and I are much in the same boat; you're old, and I'm crippled, and we're both too poor to travel. But Jack's to go, and when he's gone, you and I'll follow him on the map."

"God willing, sir," said the bee-master; and when he said that, I knew how sorry he felt for poor Charlie, for when he was moved he always said very short things, and generally something religious.

And for all Charlie's whims and fancies, and in all his pain and fretfulness, and through fits of

silence and sensitiveness, he had never a better friend than Isaac Irvine. Indeed the bee-master was one of those men (to be found in all ranks), whose delicate tenderness might not be guessed from the size and roughness of the outer man.

Our neighbours were all very kind to Mr. Wood, in their own way, but they were a little impatient of his slowness to be sociable, and had, I think, a sort of feeling that the ex-convict ought not only to enjoy evening parties more than other people, but to be just a little more grateful for being invited.

However, one must have a strong and sensitive imagination to cultivate wide sympathies when one lives a quiet, methodical life in the place where one's father and grandfather lived out quiet methodical lives before one; and I do not think we were an imaginative race.

The schoolmaster (as we used to call him) had seen and suffered so much more of life than we, that I do not think he resented the clumsiness of our sympathy; but now I look back I fancy that he must have felt as if he wanted years of peace and quiet in which to try and forget the years of suffering. Old Isaac said one day, "I reckon the master feels as if he wanted to sit down and say to himself over and over again, 'I'm a free man, I'm a free man, I'm a free man,' till he can fair trust himself to believe it."

Isaac was probably right, and perhaps evening parties, though they are meant for treats, are not the best places to sit down and feel free in, particularly when there are a lot of strange people who have heard a dreadful story about you, and want to see what you look like after it.

During the summer holidays Jem and I were out the whole day long. When we came in I was ready for the Penny Numbers, but Jem always fell asleep, even if he did not go to bed at once. My father did just the same. I think their feeling about houses was of a perfectly primitive kind. They looked upon them as comfortable shelter for sleeping and eating, but not at all as places in which to pursue any occupation. Life, for them, was lived out-of-doors.

I know now, how dull this must have made the evenings for my mother, and that it was very selfish of me to wait till my father was asleep (for fear he should say "no"), and then to ask her leave to take the Penny Numbers down to the farm and sit with Cripple Charlie.

Now and then she would go too, and chat with Mrs. Wood, whilst the schoolmaster and I were turning the terrestrial globe by Charlie's sofa; but as a rule Charlie and I were alone, and the Woods went round the homestead together, and came home, hand in hand, through the garden, and we

laughed to think how we had taken him for a tramp.

And sometimes on a summer's evening, when we talked and read aloud to each other across a quaint oak table that had been the miser's, of far-away lands and strange birds of gorgeous plumage, the schoolmaster sat silent in the arm-chair by the open lattice, resting his white head against the mullion that the ivy was creeping up, and listened to the blackbirds and thrushes as their songs dropped by odd notes into silence, and gazed at the near fields and trees, and the little homestead with its hayricks on the hill, when the grass was apple-green in the gold mist of sunset: and went on gazing when that had faded into fog, and the hedgerow elms were black against the sky, as if the eye could not be filled with seeing, nor the ear with hearing!

CHAPTER VI.

"Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
Turns his necessity to glorious gain."

Wordsworth.

"JACK," said Charlie, "listen!"

He was reading bits out of the numbers to me, whilst I was rigging a miniature yacht to sail on the dam; and Mrs. Wood's husband was making a plan of something at another table, and occasionally giving me advice about my masts and sails. "It's about the South American forests," said Charlie. "There every tree has a character of its own; each has its peculiar foliage, and probably also a tint unlike that of the trees which surround it. Gigantic vegetables of the most different families intermix their branches; five-leaved bigonias grow by the side of bonduc-trees; cassias shed their yellow blossoms upon the rich fronds of arborescent ferns; myrtles and eugenias, with their thousand arms contrast with the elegant simplicity of palms; and among the airy foliage of the mimosa the ceropia elevates its giant leaves and heavy candelabra-shaped branches. Of some trees the trunk is perfectly smooth, of others it is defended by enormous spines, and the whole are often apparently sustained by the slanting stems of a huge wild fig-tree. With us, the oak, the chestnut, and the beech seem as if they bore no flowers, so small are they and so little distinguishable except by naturalists; but in the forests of South America it is often the most gigantic trees that produce the most brilliant flowers; cassias hang down their pendants of golden blossoms, vochisias unfold their singular bunches; corollas,

longer than those of our foxglove, sometimes yellow or sometimes purple, load the arborescent bignonias; while the chorisias are covered, as it were, with lilies, only their colours are richer and more varied; grasses also appear in form of bamboos, as the most graceful of trees; bauhinias, bignonias, and arideous plants cling round the trees like enormous cables; orchideous plants and bromelias overrun their limbs, or fasten themselves to them when prostrated by the storm, and make even their dead remains become verdant with leaves and flowers not their own."

Though he could read very well, Charlie had, so far, rather stumbled through the long names in this description, but he finished off with fluency, not to say enthusiasm. "Such are the ancient forests, flourishing in a damp and fertile soil, and clothed with perpetual green."

I was half-way through a profound sigh when I caught the schoolmaster's eye, who had paused in his plan-making and was listening with his head upon his hand.

"What a groan!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"It sounds so splendid!" I answered, "and I'm so afraid I shall never see it. I told Father last night I should like to be a sailor, but he only said 'Stuff and nonsense,' and that there was a better berth waiting for me in Uncle Henry's office than any of the Queen's ships would provide for me; and Mother begged me never to talk of it any more, if I didn't want to break her heart"—and I sighed again.

The schoolmaster had a long smooth face, which looked longer from melancholy, and he turned it and his arms over the back of the chair, and looked at me with the watchful listening look his eyes always had; but I am not sure if he was really paying much attention to me, for he talked (as he often did) as if he were talking to himself.

"I wanted to be a soldier," he said, "and my father wouldn't let me. I often used to wish I had run away and enlisted, when I was with Quartermaster McCulloch, of the Engineers (he'd risen from the ranks and was younger than me), in Bermuda."

"Bermuda! That's not very far from South America, is it?" said I, looking across to the big map of the world. "Is it very beautiful, too?"

The schoolmaster's eyes contracted as if he were short-sighted, or looking at something inside his own head. But he smiled as he answered:—

"The poet says—

"A pleasing land of drowsy-head it is,
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
For ever flushing round a summer sky."

"But are there any curious beasts and plants and that sort of thing?" I asked.

"I believe there were no native animals originally," said the schoolmaster. "I mean inland ones. But the towels of the air and the fishes of the sea are of all lovely forms and colours. And such corals and sponges, and sea-anemones, blooming like flowers in the transparent pools of the warm blue water that washes the coral reefs and fills the little creeks and bays!"

I gasped—and he went on. "The commonest trees, I think, are palms and cedars. Lots of the old houses were built of cedar, and I've heard of old cedar furniture to be picked up here and there, as some people buy old oak out of English farm-houses. It is very durable and deliciously scented. People used to make cedar bonfires when the smallpox was about, to keep away infection. The gardens will grow anything, and plots of land are divided by oleander hedges of many colours."

"Oh—h!" ejaculated I, in long-drawn notes of admiration. The schoolmaster's eyes twinkled.

"Not only," continued he, "do very gaudy lobsters and quaint cray-fish and crabs with lanky legs dispute your attention on the shore with the shell-fish of the loveliest hues; there is no lack of remarkable creatures indoors. Monstrous spiders, whose bite is very unpleasant, drop from the roof; tarantulas and scorpions get into your boots, and cockroaches, hideous to behold and disgusting to smell, invade every place from your bed to your store-cupboard. If you possess anything, from food and clothing to books and boxes, the ants will find it and devour it, and if you possess a garden the mosquitoes will find you and devour you."

"Oh—h!" I exclaimed once more, but this time in a different tone.

Mr. Wood laughed heartily. "Tropical loveliness has its drawbacks, Jack. Perhaps some day when your clothes are moulded, and your brain feels mouldy too with damp heat, and you can neither work in the sun nor be at peace in the shade, you may wish you were sitting on a stool in your uncle's office, undisturbed by venomous insects, and cool in a November fog."

I laughed too, but I shook my head.

"No. I shan't mind the insects if I can get there. Charlie, were those wonderful ants old Isaac said you'd been reading about, Bermuda ants?"

I did not catch Charlie's muttered reply, and when I looked round I saw that his face was buried in the red cushions, and that he was (what *Jem* used to call) "in one of his tempers."

I don't exactly know how it was. I don't think Charlie was jealous or really cross, but he used to take fits of fancying he was in the way, and out of

it all (from being a cripple), if we seemed to be very busy without him, especially about such things as planning adventures. I knew what was the matter directly, but I'm afraid my consolation was rather clumsy.

"Don't be cross, Charlie," I said; "I thought you were listening too, and if it's because you think you won't be able to go, I don't believe there's really a bit more chance of my going, though my legs *are* all right."

"Don't bother about me," said Charlie; "but I wish you'd put these numbers down, they're in my way." And he turned pettishly over.

Before I could move, the schoolmaster had taken the papers, and was standing over Charlie's couch, with his right hand against the wall, at the level of his head, and his left arm hanging by his side; and I suppose it was his attitude which made me notice, before he began to speak, what a splendid figure he had, and how strong he looked. He spoke in an odd, abrupt sort of voice, very different from the way he had been talking to me, but he looked down at Charlie so intently, that I think he felt it through the cushions, and lifted his head.

"When your father has been bringing you down here, or at any time when you have been out amongst other people, have you ever overheard them saying, 'Poor chap! it's a sad thing,' and things of that kind, as if they were sorry for you?"

Cripple Charlie's face flushed scarlet, and my own cheeks burned, as I looked daggers at the schoolmaster, for what seemed a brutal insensibility to the lame boy's feelings. He did not condescend, however, to meet my eyes. His own were still fixed steadily on Charlie's, and he went on.

"I've heard it. My ears are quick, and for many a Sunday after I came I caught the whispers behind me as I went up the aisle, 'Poor man!' 'Poor gentleman!' 'He looks bad, too!' One morning an old woman, in a big black bonnet, said, 'Poor soul!' so close to me, that I looked down, and met her withered eyes, full of tears—for me!—and I said, 'Thank you, mother,' and she fingered the sleeve of my coat with her trembling hand (the veins were standing out on it like ropes), and said, 'I've knowed trouble myself, my dear. The Lord bless yours to you!'"

"It must have been Betty Johnson," I interpolated; but the schoolmaster did not even look at me.

"You and I," he said, bending nearer to Cripple Charlie, "have had our share of this life's pain so dealt out to that any one can see and pity us. My boy, take a fellow-sufferer's word for it, it is wise and good not to shrink from the seeing and

pitying. The weight of the cross spreads itself and becomes lighter if one learns to suffer with others as well as with oneself, to take pity and to give it. And as one learns to be pained with the pains of others, one learns to be happy in their happiness and comforted by their sympathy, and then no man's life can be quite empty of pleasure. I don't know if my troubles have been lighter or heavier ones than yours——"

The schoolmaster stopped short, and turned his head so that his face was almost hidden against his hand upon the wall. Charlie's big eyes were full of tears, and I am sure I distinctly felt my ears poke forwards on my head with anxious curiosity to catch what Mr. Wood would tell us about that dreadful time of which he had never spoken.

"When I was your age," he said bluntly, "I was unusually lithe and active and strong for mine. When I was half as old again, I was stronger than any man I knew, and had many a boyish triumph out of my strength, because I was slender and graceful, and this concealed my powers. I had all the energies and ambitions natural to unusual vigour and manly skill. I wanted to be a soldier, but it was not to be, and I spent my youth at a desk in a house of business. I adapted myself, but none the less I chafed whenever I heard of manly exploits, and of the delights and dangers that came of seeing the world. I used to think I could bear anything to cross the seas and see foreign climes. I did cross the Atlantic at last—a convict in a convict ship (GOD help any man who knows what that is!), and I spent the ten best years of my manhood at the hulks working in chains. You've never lost freedom, my lad, so you have never felt what it is not to be able to believe you've got it back. You don't know what it is to turn nervous at the responsibility of being your own master for a whole day, or to wake in a dainty room, with the birds singing at the open window, and to shut your eyes quickly and pray to go on dreaming a bit, because you feel sure you're really in your hammock in the hulks."

The schoolmaster lifted his other hand above his head, and pressed both on it, as if he were in pain. What Charlie was doing I don't know, but I felt so miserable I could not help crying, and had to hunt for my pocket-handkerchief under the table. It was full of acorns, and by the time I had emptied it and dried my eyes, Mr. Wood was lifting Charlie in his arms, and arranging his cushions.

"Oh, thank you!" Charlie said, as he leant back; "how comfortable you have made me!"

"I have been sick-nurse, amongst other trades. For some months I was a hospital warder."

"Was that when——" Charlie began, and then

he stopped short, and said, "Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"Yes; it was when I was a convict," said the schoolmaster. "No offence, my boy. If I preach I must try to practise. Jack's eyes are dropping out of his head to hear more of Bermuda, and you and I will put our whims and moods on one side, and we'll all tell travellers' tales together."

Cripple Charlie kept on saying "Thank you," and I know he was very sorry not to be able to think of anything more to say, for he told me so. He wanted to have thanked him better, because he knew that Mr. Wood had talked about his having been a convict, when he did not like to talk about it, just to show Charlie that he knew what pain, and not being able to do what you want, feel like, and that Charlie ought not to fancy he was neglected.

And that was the beginning of all the stories the schoolmaster used to tell us, and of the natural history lessons he gave us, and of his teaching me to stuff birds, and do all kinds of things.

We used to say to him, "You're better than the penny numbers, for you're quite as interesting, and we're sure you're true." And the odd thing was that he made Charlie much more contented, because he started him with so many collections, whilst he made me only more and more anxious to see the world.

CHAPTER VII.

"Much would have more, and lost all."

English Proverb.

"Learn you to an ill habit, and ye'll ca't custom."

Scotch Proverb.

THE lane was full of colour that autumn, the first autumn of the convict's return. The leaves turned early, and fell late, and made the hedges gayer than when the dog-roses were out; for not only were the leaves of all kinds brighter than many flowers, but the berries (from the holly and mountain-ash to the hips and haws) were so thick set, and so red and shining, that, as my dear mother said, "they looked almost artificial."

I remember it well, because of two things. First, that Jem got five of the largest hips we had ever seen off a leafless dog-rose branch which stuck far out of the hedge, and picked the little green coronets off, so that they were smooth and glossy, and egg-shaped, and crimson on one side and yellow on the other; and then he got an empty chaffinch's nest close by and put the five hips into it, and took it home, and persuaded

Alice our new parlourmaid that it was a robin redbreast's nest with eggs in it. And she believed it, for she came from London and knew no better.

The second thing I remember that autumn by, is that everybody expected a hard winter because of the berries being so fine, and the hard winter never came, and the birds ate worms and grubs and left most of the hedge fruits where they were.

November was bright and mild, and the morning frosts only made the berries all the glossier when the sun came out. We had one or two snowstorms in December, and then we all said, "Now, it's coming!" but the snow melted away and left no bones behind. In January the snow lay longer, and left big bones on the moors, and Jem and I made a slide to school on the pack track, and towards the end of the month the milldam froze hard, and we had slides fifteen yards long, and skating; and Winter seemed to have come back in good earnest to fetch his bones away.

Jem was great fun in frosty weather; Charlie and I used to die of laughing at him. I think cold made him pugnacious; he seemed always ready for a row, and was constantly in one. The January frost came in our Christmas holidays, so Jem had lots of time on his hands; he spent almost all of it out of doors, and he devoted a good deal of it to fighting with the rough lads of the village. There was a standing subject of quarrel, which is a great thing for either tribes or individuals who have a turn that way. A pond at the corner of the lower paddock was fed by a stream which also fed the milldam; and the milldam was close by, though, as it happened, not on my father's property. Old custom made the milldam the winter resort of all the village sliders and skaters, and my father displayed a good deal of toleration when those who could not find room for a new slide, or wished to practise their "outer edge" in a quiet spot, came climbing over the wall (there was no real thoroughfare) and invaded our pond.

Perhaps it is because gratitude is a fatiguing virtue, or perhaps it is because self-esteem has no practical limits, that favours are seldom regarded as such for long. They are either depreciated, or claimed as rights; very often both. And what is common in all classes is almost universal amongst the uneducated. You have only to make a system of giving your cast-off clothes to some shivering family, and you will not have to wait long for an eloquent essay on their shabbiness, or for an outburst of sincere indignation if you venture to reserve a warm jacket for a needy relative. Prescriptive rights, in short, grow faster than pumpkins, which is amongst the many warnings life affords us to be just as well as generous. Thence it had come

about that the young roughs of the village regarded our pond to all winter intents and purposes as theirs, and my father as only so far and so objectionably concerned in the matter that he gave John Binder a yearly job in patching up the wall which it took them three months' trouble to kick a breach in.

Our neighbours were what is called "very independent" folk. In the grown-up people this was modified by the fact that no one who has to earn his own livelihood can be quite independent of other people; if he would live he must let live, and throw a little civility into the bargain. But boys of an age when their parents found meals and hobnailed boots for them whether they behaved well or ill, were able to display independence in its roughest form. And when the boys of our neighbourhood were rough, they were very rough indeed.

The village boys had their Christmas holidays about the same time that we had ours, which left them as much spare time for sliding and skating as we had, but they had their dinner at twelve o'clock, whilst we had ours at one, so that any young roughs who wished to damage our pond were just comfortably beginning their mischief as Jem and I were saying grace before meat, and the thought of it took away our appetites again and again.

That winter they were particularly aggravating. The December frost was a very imperfect one, and the milldam never bore properly, so the boys swarmed over our pond, which was shallow and safe. Very few of them could even hobble on skates, and those few carried the art no farther than by cutting up the slides. But thaw came on, so that there was no sliding, and then the young roughs amused themselves with stamping holes in the soft ice with their hobnailed heels. When word came to us that they were taking the stones off our wall and pitching them down on to the soft ice below, to act as skaters' stumblingblocks for the rest of that hard winter which we expected, Jem's indignation was not greater than mine. My father was not at home, and indeed, when we had complained before, he rather snubbed us, and said that we could not want the whole of the pond to ourselves, and that he had always lived quietly with his neighbours and we must learn to do the same, and so forth. No action at all calculated to assuage our thirst for revenge was likely to be taken by him, so Jem and I held a council by Charlie's sofa, and it was a council of war. At the end we all three solemnly shook hands, and Charlie was left to write and despatch brief notes of summons to our more distant schoolmates, whilst Jem and I tucked up our trousers, wound our com-

forters sternly round our throats, and went forth in different directions to gather the rest.

(Having lately been reading about the Highlanders, who used to send round a fiery cross when the clans were called to battle, I should have liked to do so in this instance; but as some of the Academy boys were no greater readers than Jem, they might not have known what it meant, so we abandoned the notion.)

There was not an Academy boy worth speaking of who was in time for dinner the following day; and several of them brought brothers, or cousins to the fray. By half-past twelve we had crept down the field that was on the other side of our wall, and had hidden ourselves in various corners of a cattle-shed, where a big cart and some sail-cloth and a turnip heap provided us with ambush. By-and-by certain familiar whoops and hullahs announced that the enemy was coming. One or two bigger boys made for the dam (which I confess was a relief to us), but our own particular foes advanced with a rush upon the wall.

"They hev'n't coomed yet, hev they?" we heard the sexton's son say, as he peeped over at our pond.

"Noa," was the reply. "It's not gone one yet."

"It's gone one by t' church. I yead it as we was coming up t' lane."

"T' church clock's always hafe-an-hour fasst, thee knows."

"It isn't!"

"It is."

"T' church clock's t' one to go by, anyhow," said the sexton's son maintained.

His friend guffawed aloud.

"And it's a reight un to go by too, my sakes! when thee feyther shifts t' time back'ards and for'ards every Sunday morning to suit hissen."

"To suit hissen! To suit t' ringers, ye mean!" said the sexton's son.

"What's thou to do wi' t' ringers?" was the reply, enforced apparently by a punch in the back, and the two lads came cuffing and struggling up the field, much to my alarm, but fortunately they were too busy to notice us.

Meanwhile, the rest had not been idle at the wall. Jem had climbed on the cart, and peeping through a brick hole he could see that they had with some difficulty disengaged a very heavy stone. As we were turning our heads to watch the two lads fighting near our hiding-place, we heard the stone strike with a heavy thud upon the rotten ice below, and it was echoed by a groan of satisfaction from above.

("Ready!" I whispered.)

"Yon'll break somebody's nose when it's frosted

in," cried Bob Furniss, in a tone of sincere gratification.

"Eh, Tim Binder! there'll be a rare job for thee feyther next spring, fettling up this wall, by t' time we've done wi' it."

"Let me come," we heard Tim say. "Thou can't handle a stone. Let me come. Th' ice is as soft as loppered milk, and i' ten minutes I'll fill yon bit they're so chuff of skating on, as thick wi' stones as a quarry."

("Now!" I said.)

Our foes considerably outnumbered us, but I think they were at a disadvantage. They had worked off a good deal of their steam, and ours was at explosion point. We took them by surprise and in the rear. They had had some hard exercise, and we were panting to begin. As a matter of fact those who could get away ran away. We caught all we could, and punched and pummelled and rolled them in the snow to our hearts' content.

Jem never was much of a talker, and I never knew him speak when he was fighting; but three several times on this occasion, I heard him say very stiffly and distinctly (he was on the top of Tim Binder), "I'll fettle thee! I'll fettle thee! I'll fettle thee!"

The battle was over, the victory was ours, but the campaign was not ended, and thenceforward the disadvantages would be for us. Even real warfare is complicated when men fight with men less civilized than themselves; and we had learnt before now that when we snowballed each other or snowballed the rougher "lot" of village boys, we did so under different conditions. *We* had our own code of honour and fairness, but Bob Furniss was not above putting a stone into a snowball if he owed a grudge.

So when we heard a rumour that the bigger "roughs" were going to join the younger ones, and lie in wait to "pay us off" the first day we came down to the ice, I cannot say we felt comfortable, though we resolved to be courageous. Meanwhile, the thaw continued, which suspended operations, and gave time, which is good for healing; and Christmas came, and we and our foes met and mingled in the mummeries of the season, and wished each other Happy New Years, and said nothing about the pond.

How my father came to hear of the matter we did not know at the time, but one morning he summoned Jem and me, and bade us tell him all about it. I was always rather afraid of my father, and I should have made out a very startling story, but Jem flushed up like a turkey-cock, and gave our version of the business very straightforwardly. The other side of the tale my father

had evidently heard, and we fancied he must have heard also of the intended attack on us, for it never took place, and we knew of interviews which he had with John Binder and others of our neighbours; and when the frost came in January, we found that the stones had been taken out of the pond, and my father gave us a sharp lecture against being quarrelsome and giving ourselves airs, and it ended with—"The pond is mine. I wish you to remember it because it makes it your duty to be hospitable and civil to the boys I allow to go on it. And I have very decidedly warned them and their parents to remember it, because if my permission for fair amusement is abused to damage and trespass, I shall withdraw the favour and prosecute intruders. But the day I shut up my pond from my neighbours, I shall forbid you and Jack to go on it again unless the fault is more entirely on one side than it's likely to be when boys squabble."

My father waved our dismissal, but I hesitated.

"The boys won't think we told tales to you to get out of another fight?" I gasped.

"Everybody knows perfectly well how I heard. It came to the sexton's ears, and he very properly informed me."

I felt relieved, and the first day we had on the ice went off very fairly. The boys were sheepish at first and slow to come on, and when they had assembled in force they were inclined to be bullying. But Jem and I kept our tempers, and by-and-by my father came down to see us, and headed a long slide in which we and our foes were combined. As he left he pinched Jem's frosty ear, and said, "Let me hear if there's any real malice, but don't double your fists at every trifle. Slide and let slide! slide and let slide!" And he took a pinch of snuff and departed.

And Jem was wonderfully peaceable for the rest of the day. A word from my father went a long way with him. They were very fond of each other.

I had no love of fighting for fighting's sake, and I had other interests besides sliding and skating; so I was well satisfied that we got through the January frost without further breaches of the peace. Towards the end of the month we all went a good deal upon the milldam, and Mr. Wood (assisted by me as far as watching, handing tools and asking questions went) made a rough sledge, in which he pushed Charlie before him as he skated; and I believe the village boys, as well as his own school-fellows, were glad that Cripple Charlie had a share in the winter fun, for wherever Mr. Wood drove him, both sliders and skaters made way.

And even on the pond there were no more real battles that winter. Only now and then some

mischievous urchin tripped up our brand-new skates, and begged our pardon as he left us on our backs. And more than once, when "the island" in the middle of the pond was a very fairyland of hoar-frosted twigs and snow-plumed larches, I have seen its white loveliness rudely shaken, and skating round to discover the cause, have beheld Jem, with cheeks redder than his scarlet comforter, return an "accidental" shove with interest; or, posed like a ruffled robin redbreast, to defend a newly-made slide against intruders.

CHAPTER VIII.

"He it was who sent the snowflakes
Sifting, hissing through the forest;
Froze the ponds, the lakes, the rivers,"

Shinbegis, the diver, feared not."
The Song of Hiawatha.

THE first day of February was mild, and foggy, and cloudy, and in the night I woke feeling very hot, and threw off my quilt, and heard the dripping of soft rain in the dark outside, and thought, "There goes our skating." Towards morning, however, I woke again, and had to pull the quilt back into its place, and when I started after breakfast to see what the dam looked like, there was a sharpish frost, which, coming after a day of thaw, had given the ice such a fine smooth surface as we had not had for long.

I felt quite sorry for Jem, because he was going in the dogcart with my father to see a horse, and as I hadn't got him to skate with, I went down to the farm after breakfast, to see what Charlie and the Woods were going to do. Charlie was not well, but Mr. Wood said he would come to the dam with me after dinner, as he had to go to the next village on business, and the dam lay in his way.

"Keep to the pond this morning, Jack," he added, to my astonishment. "Remember it thawed all yesterday; and if the wheel was freed and has been turning, it has run water off from under the ice, and all may not be sound that's smooth."

The pond was softer than it looked, but the milldam was most tempting. A sheet of "glare ice," as Americans say, smooth and clear as a newly-washed window-pane. I did not go on it, but I brought Mr. Wood to it early in the afternoon, in the full hope that he would give me leave.

We found several young men on the bank, some

fastening their skates and some trying the ice with their heels, and as we stood there the numbers increased, and most of them went on without hesitation; and when they rushed in groups together, I noticed that the ice slightly swayed.

"The ice bends a good deal," said Mr. Wood to a man standing next to us.

"They say it's not so like to break when it bends," was the reply; and the man moved on.

A good many of the elder men from the village had come up, and a group, including John Binder, now stood alongside of us.

"There's a good sup of water atop of it," said the mason; and I noticed then that the ice seemed to look wetter, like newly-washed glass still, but like glass that wants wiping dry.

"I'm afraid the ice is not safe," said the schoolmaster.

"It's a tidy thickness, sir," said John Binder, and a heavy man, with his hands in his pockets and his back turned to us, stepped down and gave two or three jumps, and then got up again, and, with his back still turned towards us, said—

"It's reight enough."

"It's right enough for one man, but not for a crowd, I'm afraid. Was the waterwheel freed last night, do you know?"

"It was loosed last night, but it's froz again," said a bystander.

"It's not freezing now," said the schoolmaster, "and you may see how much larger that weak place where the stream is has got since yesterday. However," he added, good-humouredly, "I suppose you think you know your own milldam and its ways better than I can?"

"Well," said the heavy man, still with his back to us, "I reckon we've slid on this dam a many winters afore you come. No offence, I hope?"

"By no means," said the schoolmaster; "but if you old hands do begin to feel doubtful as the afternoon goes on, call off those lads at the other end in good time. And if you could warn them not to go in rushes together—but perhaps they would not listen to you," he added with a spice of malice.

"I don't suppose they would, sir," said John Binder, candidly. "They're very venturesome, is lads."

"I reckon they'll suit themselves," said the heavy man, and he jumped on to the ice, and went off, still with his back to us.

"If I hadn't lived so many years out of England and out of the world," said the schoolmaster, turning to me with a half-vexed laugh, "I don't suppose I should discredit myself to no purpose by telling fools they are in danger. Jack I will you promise me not to go on the dam this afternoon?"

"It is dangerous, is it?" I asked reluctantly; for I wanted sorely to join the rest.

"That's a matter of opinion, it seems. But I have a wish that you should not go on till I come back. I'll be as quick as I can. Promise me."

"I promise," said I.

"Will you walk with me?" he asked. But I refused. I thought I would rather watch the others; and accordingly, after I had followed the schoolmaster with my eyes as he strode off at a pace that promised soon to bring him back, I put my hands into my pockets and joined the groups of watchers on the bank. I suppose if I had thought about it, I might have observed that though I was dawdling about, my nose and ears and fingers were not nipped. Mr. Wood was right,—it had not been freezing for hours past.

The first thing I looked for was the heavy man. He was so clumsy looking that I quite expected him to fall when he walked off on to ice only fit for skaters. But as I looked closer I saw that the wet on the top was beginning to have a curdled look, and that the glassiness of the milldam was much diminished. The heavy man's heavy boots got good foothold, and several of his friends, seeing this, went after him. And my promise weighed sorely on me.

The next thing that drew my attention was a lad of about seventeen, who was skating really well. Indeed, everybody was looking at him, for he was the only one of the villagers who could perform in any but the clumsiest fashion, and, with an active interest that hovered between jeering and applause, his neighbours followed him up and down the dam. As I might not go on, I wandered up and down the bank too, and occasionally joined in a murmured cheer when he deftly evaded some intentional blunderer, or cut a figure at the request of his particular friends. I got tired at last, and went down to the pond, where I ploughed about for a time on my skates in solitude, for the pond was empty. Then I ran up to the house to see if Jem had come back, but he had not, and I returned to the dam to wait for the schoolmaster.

The crowd was larger than before, for everybody's work-hours were over; and the skater was still displaying himself. He was doing very difficult figures now, and I ran round to where the bank was covered with people watching him. In the minute that followed I remember three things with curious distinctness. First, that I saw Mr. Wood coming back, only one field off, and beckoned to him to be quick, because the lad was beginning to cut a double three backwards, and I wanted the schoolmaster to see it. Secondly, that the sight of him seemed suddenly to bring to my

mind that we were all on the far side of the dam, the side he thought dangerous. And thirdly, that, quickly as my eyes passed from Mr. Wood to the skater, I caught sight of a bloated-looking young man, whom we all knew as a sort of typical "bad lot," standing with another man who was a great better, and from a movement between them, it just flashed through my head that they were betting as to whether the lad would cut the double three backwards or not.

He cut one—two—and then he turned too quickly and his skate caught in the softening ice, and when he came headlong, his head struck, and where it struck it went through. It looked so horrible that it was a relief to see him begin to struggle; but the weakened ice broke around him with every effort, and he went down.

For many a year afterwards I used to dream of his face as he sank, and of the way the ice heaved like the breast of some living thing, and fell back, and of the heavy waves that rippled over it out of that awful hole. But great as was the shock, it was small to the storm of shame and agony that came over me when I realized that every comrade who had been around the lad had saved himself by a rush to the bank, where we huddled together, a gaping crowd of foolhardy cowards, without skill to do anything or heart to dare anything to save him.

At the time it maddened me so, that I felt that if I could not help the lad I would rather be drowned in the hole with him, and I began to scramble in a foolish way down the bank, but John Binder caught me by the arm and pulled me back, and said (I suppose to soothe me),

"Yon's the schoolmaster, sir;" and then I saw Mr. Wood fling himself over the hedge by the alder thicket (he was rather good at high jumps), and come flying along the bank towards us, when he said—

"What's the matter?"

I threw my arms round him and sobbed, "He was cutting a double three backwards, and he went in."

Mr. Wood unclasped my arms and turned to the rest.

"What have you done with him?" he said. "Did he hurt himself?"

If the crowd was cowardly and helpless, it was not indifferent; and I shall never forget the haggard faces that turned by one impulse, where a dozen grimy hands pointed—to the hole.

"He's drowned dead," "He's under t' ice," "He went right down," several men hastened to reply, but most of them only enforced the mute explanation of their pointed finger, with "He's yonder."

For yet an instant I don't think Mr. Wood believed it, and then he seized the man next to him (without looking, for he was blind with rage) and said—

"He's yonder, and you're here?"

As it happened, it was the man who had talked with his back to us. He was very big and very heavy, but he reeled when Mr. Wood shook him, like a feather caught by a storm.

"You were foolhardy enough an hour ago," said the schoolmaster. "Won't one of you venture on to your own dam to help a drowning man?"

"There's none on us can swim, sir," said John Binder. "It's a bad job"—and he gave a sob that made me begin to cry again, and several other people too—"but where'd be t' use of drowning five or six more atop of him?"

"Can any of you run if you can't swim?" said the schoolmaster. "Get a stout rope—as fast as you can, and send somebody for the doctor and a bottle of brandy, and a blanket or two to carry him home in. Jack! Hold these."

I took his watch and his purse, and he went down the bank and walked on to the ice; but after a time his feet went through as the skater's head had gone.

"It ain't a bit of use. There's naught to be done," said the bystanders: for, except those who had run to do Mr. Wood's bidding, we were all watching and all huddled closer to the edge than ever. The schoolmaster went down on his hands and knees, on which a big lad, with his hands in his trouser pockets, guffawed.

"What's he up to now?" he asked.

"Thee may haud thee tongue if thee can do naught," said a mill-girl who had come up. "I reckon he knows what he's efter better nor thee." She had pushed to the front, and was crouched upon the edge, and seemed very much excited. "God bless him for trying to save t' best lad in t' village i' any fashion, say I! There's them that's nearer kin to him and not so kind."

Perhaps the strict justice of this taunt prevented a reply (for there lurks some fairness in the roughest of us), or perhaps the crowd, being chiefly men, knew from experience that there are occasions when it is best to let a woman say her say.

"Ye see he's trying to spread himself out," John Binder explained in pacific tones. "I reckon he thinks it'll bear him if he shifts half of his weight on to his hands."

The girl got nearer to the mason, and looked up at him with her eyes full of tears.

"Thank ye, John," she said. "D'ye think he'll get him out?"

"Maybe, he will, my lass. He's a man that

knows what he's doing. I'll say so much for him."

"Nay!" added the mason sorrowfully. "Th' ice 'll never hold him—his hand's in—and there goes his knee. Maester! maester!" he shouted, "Come off! come off!" and many a voice besides mine echoed him, "Come off! come off!"

The girl got John Binder by the arm, and said hoarsely, "Fetch him off! He's a reight good 'un—over good to be drowned, if—if it's of no use." And she sat down on the bank, and pulled her millshawl over her head, and cried as I had never seen anyone cry before.

I was so busy watching her that I did not see that Mr. Wood had got back to the bank. Several hands were held out to help him, but he shook his head and said—"Got a knife?"

Two or three jack knives were out in an instant. He pointed to the alder thicket. "I want two poles," he said, "sixteen feet long, if you can, and as thick as my wrist at the bottom."

"All right, sir."

He sat down on the bank, and I rushed up and took one of his cold wet hands in both mine, and said, "Please please, don't go on any more."

"He must be dead ever so long ago," I added, repeating what I had heard.

"He hasn't been in the water ten minutes," said the schoolmaster, laughing. "Jack! Jack! you're not half ready for travelling yet. You must learn not to lose your head and your heart and your wits and your sense of time in this fashion, if you mean to be any good at a pinch to yourself or your neighbours. Has the rope come?"

"No, sir."

"Those poles?" said the schoolmaster, getting up.

"They're here!" I shouted, as a young forest of poles came towards us, so willing had been the owners of the jack-knives. The thickest had been cut by the heavy man, and Mr. Wood took it first.

"Thank you, friend," he said. The man didn't speak, and he turned his back as usual, but he gave a sideways surly nod before he turned. The schoolmaster chose a second pole, and then pushed both before him right out on to the ice, in such a way that with the points touching each other they formed a sort of huge A, the thicker ends being the nearer to the bank.

"Now Jack," said he, "pay attention; and no more blubbering. There's always plenty of time for giving way *afterwards*."

As he spoke he scrambled on to the poles, and began to work himself and them over the ice, wriggling in a kind of snake fashion in the direction of the hole. We watched him breathlessly, but within ten yards of the hole he stopped. He

evidently dared not go on; and the same thought seized all of us—"Can he get back?" Spreading his legs and arms he now lay flat upon the poles, peering towards the hole as if to try if he could see anything of the drowning man. It was only for an instant, then he rolled over on to the rotten ice, smashed through, and sank more suddenly than the skater had done.

The mill-girl jumped up with a wild cry and rushed to the water, but John Binder pulled her back as he had pulled me. Martha, our housemaid, said afterwards (and was ready to take oath on the gilt-edged church service my mother gave her) that the girl was so violent that it took fourteen men to hold her; but Martha wasn't there, and I only saw two, one at each arm, and when she fainted they laid her down and left her, and hurried back to see what was going on. For tenderness is an acquired grace in men, and it was not common in our neighbourhood.

What was going on was that John Binder had torn his hat from his head and was saying, "I don't know if there's aught we *can* do, but I can't go home myself and leave him yonder. I'm a married man with a family, but I don't vally *my* life if—"

But the rest of this speech was drowned in noise more eloquent than words, and then it broke into cries of "See thee!—It is—it's t'maester! and he has—no!—yea!—he *has*—he's gotten him. Poily, lass! he's fetched up thy Arthur by t' hair of his head."

It was strictly true. The schoolmaster told me afterwards how it was. When he found that the ice would bear no longer, he rolled into the water on purpose, but, to his horror, he felt himself seized by the drowning man, which pulled him suddenly down. The lad had risen once, it seems, though we had not seen him, and had got a breath of air at the hole, but the edge broke in his numbed fingers, and he sank again and drifted under the ice. When he rose the second time, by an odd chance it was just where Mr. Wood broke in, and his clutch of the schoolmaster nearly cost both their lives.

"If ever," said Mr. Wood, when he was talking about it afterwards, "if ever, Jack, when you're out in the world you get under water, and somebody tries to save you; when he grips *you*, don't seize *him*, if you can muster self-control to avoid it. If you cling to him, you'll either drown both, or you'll force him to do as I did—throttle you, to keep you quiet."

"Did you?" I gasped.

"Of course I did. I got him by the throat and dived with him—the only real risk I ran, as I did not know how deep the dam was."

"It's an old quarry," said I.

"I know now. We went down well, and I squeezed his throat as we went. As soon as he was still we naturally rose, and I turned on my back and got him by the head. I looked about for the hole, and saw it glimmering above me like a moon in a fog, and then up we came."

When they did come up, our joy was so great that for the moment we felt as if all was accomplished; but far the hardest part really was to come. When the schoolmaster clutched the poles once more, and drove one under the lad's arms and under his own left arm, and so kept his burden afloat whilst he broke a swimming path for himself with the other, our admiration of his cleverness gave place to the blessed thought that it might now be possible to help him. The sight of the poles seemed suddenly to suggest it, and in a moment every spare pole had been seized, and, headed by our heavy friend, eight or ten men plunged in, and, smashing the ice before them, waded out to meet the schoolmaster. On the bank we were dead silent; in the water they neither stopped nor spoke till it was breast high round their leader.

I have often thought, and have always felt quite sure, that if the heavy man had gone on till the little grey waves and the bits of ice closed over him, not a soul of those who followed him would—*nay, could*—have turned back. Heroism, like cowardice, is contagious, and I do not think there was one of us by that time who would have feared to dare or grudge to die.

As it was, the heavy man stood still and shouted for the rope. It had come, and perhaps it was not the smallest effect of the day's teaching, that those on the bank paid it out at once to those in the water till it reached the leader, without waiting to ask why he wanted it. The grace of obedience is slow to be learnt by disputatious northmen, but we had had some hard teaching that afternoon.

When the heavy man got the rope he tied the middle part of it round himself, and, coiling the shorter end, he sent it, as if it had been a quoit, skimming over the ice towards the schoolmaster. As it unwound itself it slid along, and after a struggle Mr. Wood grasped it. I fancy he fastened it round the lad's body; and got his own hands freer to break the ice before them. Then the heavy man turned, and the long end of the line, passing from hand to hand in the water, was seized upon the bank by every one who could get hold of it. I never was more squeezed and buffeted in my life; but we fairly fought for the privilege of touching it if it were but a strand of the rope that dragged them in.

And a flock of wild birds, resting on their

journey at the other end of the milldam, rose in terror and pursued their seaward way; so wild and so prolonged were the echoes of that strange, speechless cry in which collective man gives vent to overpowering emotion.

It is odd, when one comes to think of it, but I know it is true, for two sensible words would have stuck in my own throat and choked me, but I cheered till I could cheer no longer.

CHAPTER IX.

"In doubtful matters Courage may do much:—In desperate—Patience."

Old Proverb.

THE young skater duly recovered, and thenceforward Mr. Wood's popularity in the village was established, and the following summer he started a swimming-class, to which the young men flocked with more readiness than they commonly showed for efforts made to improve them.

For my own part I had so realised, to my shame, that one may feel very adventurous and yet not know how to venture or what to venture in the time of need, that my whole heart was set upon getting the schoolmaster to teach me to swim and to dive, with any other lessons in preparedness of body and mind which I was old enough to profit by. And if the true tales of his own experiences were more interesting than the Penny Numbers, it was better still to feel that one was qualifying in one's own proper person for a life of adventure.

During the winter Mr. Wood built a boat, which was christened the *Adela*, after his wife. It was an interesting process to us all. I hung about and did my best to be helpful, and both Jem and I spoiled our everyday trousers, and rubbed the boat's sides, the day she was painted. It was from the *Adela* that Jem and I had our first swimming-lessons, Mr. Wood lowering us with a rope under our arms, by which he gave us as much support as was needed, whilst he taught us how to strike out.

We had swimming-races on the canal, and having learned to swim and dive without our clothes, we learnt to do so in them, and found it much more difficult for swimming and easier for diving. It was then that the trousers we had damaged when the *Adela* was built came in most usefully, and saved us from having to attempt the at least equally difficult task of persuading my mother to let us spoil good ones in an amusement which had the unpardonable quality of being "very odd."

Dear old Charlie had as much fun out of the boat as we had, though he could not learn to dive. He used to look as if every minute of a pull up the canal on a sunny evening gave him pleasure; and the brown Irish spaniel Jem gave him used to swim after the boat and look up in Charlie's face as if it knew how he enjoyed it. And later on, Mr. Wood taught Bob Furniss to row and Charlie to steer; so that Charlie could sometimes go out and feel quite free to stop the boat when and where he liked. That was after he started so many collections of insects and water-weeds, and shells, and things you can only see under a microscope. Bob and he used to take all kinds of pots and pans and nets and dippers with them, so that Charlie could fish up what he wanted, and keep things separate. He was obliged to keep the live things he got for his fresh-water aquarium in different jam-pots, because he could never be sure which would eat up which till he knew them better, and the water-scorpions and the dragon-fly larvæ ate everything. Bob Furniss did not mind pulling in among the reeds and waiting as long as you wanted. Mr. Wood sometimes wanted to get back to his work, but Bob never wanted to get back to his. And he was very good-natured about getting into the water and wading and grubbing for things; indeed, I think he got to like it.

At first Mr. Wood had been rather afraid of trusting Charlie with him. He thought Bob might play tricks with the boat, even though he knew how to manage her, when there was only one helpless boy with him. But Mrs. Furniss said, "Nay! Our Bob's a bad 'un, but he's not one of that sort, he'll not plague them that's afflicted." And she was quite right; for though his father said he could be trusted with nothing else, we found he could be trusted with Cripple Charlie.

It was two days before the summer holidays came to an end that Charlie asked me to come down to the farm and help him to put away his fern collection and a lot of other things into the places that he had arranged for them in his room; for now that the schoolroom was wanted again, he could not leave his papers and boxes about there. Charlie lived at the farm altogether now. He was better there than on the moors, so he boarded there and went home for visits. The room Mrs. Wood had given him was the one where the old miser had slept. In a memorandum left with his will it appeared that he had expressed a wish that the furniture of that room should not be altered, which was how they knew it was his. So Mrs. Wood had kept the curious old oak bed (the back of which was fastened into the wall), and an old oak press, with a great number of

drawers with brass handles to them, and all the queer furniture that she found there, just as it was. Even the brass warming-pan was only rubbed and put back in its place, and the big bellows were duly hung up by the small fireplace. But everything was so polished up and cleaned, the walls repapered with a soft grey-green paper spangled with dogdaisies, and the room so brightened up with fresh blinds and bedclothes, and a bit of bright carpet, that it did not look in the least dismal, and Charlie was very proud and very fond of it. It had two windows, one where the beehive was, and one very sunny one, where he had a balm of Gilead that Isaac's wife gave him, and his old medicine-bottles full of cuttings on the upper ledge. The old women used to send him "slippings" off their fairy roses and myrtles and fuchsias, and they rooted very well in that window, there was so much sun.

Charlie had only just begun a fern collection, and I had saved my pocket-money (I did not want it for anything else) and had bought him several quires of cartridge-paper; and Dr. Brown had given him a packet of medicine-labels to cut up into strips to fasten his specimens in with, and the collection looked very well and very scientific; and all that remained was to find a good place to put it away in. The drawers of the press were of all shapes and sizes, but there were two longish very shallow ones that just matched each other, and when I pulled one of them out, and put the fern-papers in, they fitted exactly, and the drawer just held half the collection. I called Charlie to look, and he hobbled up on his crutches and was delighted, but he said he should like to put the others in himself, so I got him into a chair, and shut up the full drawer and pulled out the empty one, and went downstairs for the two mole-skins we were curing, and the glue-pot, and the toffytin, and some other things that had to be cleared out of the schoolroom now the holidays were over.

When I came back the fern-papers were still outside, and Charlie was looking flushed and cross.

"I don't know how you managed," he said, "but I can't get them in. This drawer must be shorter than the other; it doesn't go nearly so far back."

"Oh yes, it does, Charlie!" I insisted, for I felt as certain as people always do feel about little details of that kind. "The drawers are exactly alike; you can't have got the fern-sheets quite flush with each other," and I began to arrange the trayful of things I had brought upstairs in the bottom of the cupboard.

"I know it's the drawer," I heard Charlie say. ("He's as obstinate as possible," thought I.)

Then I heard him banging at the wood with his fists and his crutch. ("He *is* in a temper!" was my mental comment.) After this my attention was distracted for a second or two by seeing what I thought was a bit of toffy left in the tin, and biting it and finding it was a piece of sheet-glue. I had not spit out all the disgust of it, when Charlie called me in low, awe-struck tones: "Jack! come here. Quick!"

I ran to him. The drawer was open, but it seemed to have another drawer inside it, a long, narrow, shallow one.

"I hit the back, and this sprang out," said Charlie. "It's a secret drawer—and look!"

I did look. The secret drawer was closely packed with rolls of thin leaflets, which we were old enough to recognize as bank-notes, and with little bags of wash-leather; and when Charlie opened the little bags they were filled with gold.

There was a paper with the money, written by the old miser, to say that it was a codicil to his will, and that the money was all for Mrs. Wood. Why he had not left it to her in the will itself seemed very puzzling, but his lawyer (whom the Woods consulted about it) said that he always did things in a very eccentric way, but generally for some sort of reason, even it were rather a freaky one, and that perhaps he thought that the relations would be less spiteful at first if they did not know about the money, and that Mrs. Wood would soon find it, if she used and valued his old press.

I don't quite know whether there was any fuss with the relations about this part of the bequest, but I suppose the lawyer managed it all right, for the Woods got the money and gave up the school. But they kept the old house, and bought some more land, and Walnut-tree Academy became Walnut-tree Farm once more. And Cripple Charlie lived on with them, and he was so happy, it really seemed as if my dear mother was right when she said to my father, "I am so pleased, my dear, for that poor boy's sake, I can hardly help crying. He's got two homes and two fathers and mothers, where many a young man has none, as if to make good his affliction to him."

It puzzles me, even now, to think how my father could have sent Jem and me to Crayshaw's School. (Nobody ever called him Mr. Crayshaw except the parents of pupils who lived at a distance. In the neighbourhood he and his whole establishment were lumped under the one word *Crayshaw's*, and as a farmer hard by once said to me, "Crayshaw's is universally disrespected.")

I do not think it was merely because "Crayshaw's" was cheap that we were sent there, though

my father had so few reasons to give for his choice that he quoted that among them. A man with whom he had had business dealings (which gave him much satisfaction for some years, and more dissatisfaction afterwards) did really, I think, persuade my father to send us to this school, one evening when they were dining together.

Few things are harder to guess at than the grounds on which an Englishman of my father's type "makes up his mind"; and yet the question is an important one, for an idea once lodged in his head, a conviction once as much his own as the family acres, and you will as soon part him from the one as from the other. I have known little matters of domestic improvements, in which my mother's comfort was concerned and her experience conclusive, for which he grudged a few shillings, and was absolutely impenetrable by her persuasions and representations. And I have known him waste pounds on things of the most curious variety, foisted on him by advertising agents without knowledge, trial, or rational ground of confidence. I suppose that persistency, a glibber tongue than he himself possessed, a mass of printed rubbish which always looks imposing to the unlitery, that primitive combination of authoritativeness and hospitality which makes some men as ready to say Yes to a stranger as they are to say No at home, and perhaps some lack of moral courage, may account for it. I can clearly remember how quaintly sheepish my father used to look after committing some such folly, and how, after the first irrepressible fall of countenance, my mother would have defended him against anybody else's opinion, let alone her own. Young as I was I could feel that, and had a pretty accurate estimate of the value of the moral lecture on faith in one's fellow-creatures, which was an unfailing outward sign of my father's inward conviction that he had been taken in by a rogue. I knew too, well enough, that my mother's hasty and earnest Amen to this discourse was an equally reliable token of her knowledge that my father sorely needed defending, and some instinct made me aware also that my father knew that this was so. That he knew that it was that tender generosity towards one's beloved, in which so many of her sex so far exceed ours, and not an intellectual conviction of his wisdom, which made her support what he had done, and that feeling this he felt dissatisfied, and snapped at her accordingly.

The dislike my dear mother took to the notion of our going to Crayshaw's only set seals to our fate, and the manner of her protests was not more fortunate than the matter. She was timid and vacillating from wifely habit, whilst motherly anxiety goaded her to be persistent and almost

irritable on the subject. Habitually regarding her own wishes and views as worthless, she quoted the Woods at every turn of her arguments, which was a mistake, for my father was sufficiently like the rest of his neighbours not to cotton very warmly to people whose tastes, experiences, and lines of thought were so much out of the common as those of the ex-convict and his wife. Moreover, he had made up his mind, and when one has done that, he is proof against seventy men who can render a reason.

To rumours which accused "Crayshaw's" of undue severity, of discomfort, of bad teaching and worse manners, my father opposed arguments which he allowed were "old-fashioned" and which were far-fetched from the days of our great-grandfather.

A strict schoolmaster was a good schoolmaster, and if more parents were as wise as Solomon on the subject of the rod, Old England would not be discredited by such a namby-pamby race as young men of the present day seemed by all accounts to be. It was high time the boys did rough it a bit; would my mother have them always tied to her apron-strings? Great Britain would soon be Little Britain if boys were to be brought up like young ladies. As to teaching, it was the fashion to make a fuss about it, and a pretty pass learning brought some folks to, to judge by the papers and all one heard. His own grandfather lived to ninety-seven, and died sitting in his chair, in a bottle-green coat and buff breeches. He wore a pigtail to the day of his death, and never would be contradicted by anybody. He had often told my father that at the school *he* went to, the master signed the receipts for his money with a cross, but the usher was a bit of a scholar, and the boys had cream to their porridge on Sundays. And the old gentleman managed his own affairs to ninety-seven, and threw the doctor's medicine-bottles out of the window then. He died without a doubt on his mind or a debt on his books, and my father (taking a pinch out of Great-Grandfather's snuff-box) hoped Jem and I might do as well.

In short, we were sent to "Crayshaw's."

It was not a happy period of my life. It was not a good or wholesome period; and I am not fond of recalling it. The time came when I shrank from telling Charlie everything, almost as if he had been a girl. His life was lived in such a different atmosphere, under such different conditions. I could not trouble him, and I did not believe he could make allowances for me. But on our first arrival I wrote him a long letter (Jem never wrote letters), and the other day he showed it to me. It was a first impression, but a sufficiently vivid and truthful one, so I give it here.

CRAYSHAW'S (for that's what they call it here, and a beastly hole it is).

Monday.

MY DEAR OLD CHARLIE,—We came earlier than was settled, for father got impatient and there was nothing to stop us, but I don't think old Crayshaw liked our coming so soon. You never saw such a place, it's so dreary. A boy showed us straight into the schoolroom. There are three rows of double desks running down the room and disgustingly dirty, I don't know what Mrs. Wood would say, and old Crayshaw's desk is in front of the fire, so that he can see all the boys sideways, and it just stops any heat coming to them. And there he was, and I don't think father liked the look of him particularly, you never saw an uglier. Such a flaming face and red eyes like Bob Furniss's ferret and great-big whiskers; but I'll make you a picture of him, at least I'll make two pictures, for Lewis Lorraine says he's got no beard on Sundays, and rather a good one on Saturdays. Lorraine is a very rum fellow, but I like him. It was he showed us in, and he did catch it afterwards, but he only makes fun of it. Old Crayshaw's desk had got a lot of canes on one side of it and a most beastly dirty snuffly red and green handkerchief on the other, and an ink-pot in the middle. He made up to father like anything and told such thumpers. He said there were six boys in one room, but really there's twelve. Jem and I sleep together. There's nothing to wash in and no prayers. If you say them you get boots at your head, and one hit Jem behind the ear, so I pulled his sleeve and said, "Get up, you can say them in bed." But you know Jem, and he said, "Wait till I've done, *God bless father and mother*," and when he had, he went in and fought, and I backed him up, and then old Crayshaw found us, and oh, how he did beat us!

— *Wednesday.* Old Snuffly is a regular brute, and I don't care if he finds this and sees what I say. But he won't, for the milkman is taking it. He always does if you can pay him. But I've put most of my money into the bank. Three of the top boys have a bank, and we all have to deposit, only I kept fourpence in one of my boots. They give us bank-notes for a penny and a halfpenny; they make them themselves. The sweetshop takes them. They only give you eleven penny notes for a shilling in the bank, or else it would burst. At dinner we have a lot of pudding to begin with, and it's very heavy. You can hardly eat anything afterwards. The first day Lorraine said quite out loud and very polite, "Did you say *duff before meat*, young gentlemen?" and I couldn't help laughing, and old Snuffly beat his head

horridly with his dirty fists. But Lorraine minds nothing; he says he knows old Snuffly will kill him some day, but he says he doesn't want to live, for his father and mother are dead; he only wants to catch old Snuffly in three more booby-traps before he dies. He's caught him in four already. You see, when old Snuffly is cat-walking he wears goloshes that he may sneak about better, and the way Lorraine makes boobytraps is by balancing cans of water on the door when it's ajar, so that he gets doused, and the can falls on his head, and strings across the bottom of the door, not far from the ground, so that he catches his goloshes and comes down. The other fellows say that old Crayshaw had a lot of money given him in trust for Lorraine, and he's spent it all, and Lorraine has no one to stick up for him, and that's why Crayshaw hates him.

— *Saturday.* I could not catch the milkman, and now I've got your letter, though Snuffly read it first. Jem and I cry dreadful in bed. That's the comfort of being together. I'll try and be as good as I can, but you don't know what this place is. It's very different to the farm. Do you remember the row about that book Horace Simpson got? I wish you could see the books the boys have here. At least I don't wish it, for I wish I didn't look at them, the milkman brings them; he always will if you can pay him. When I saw old Snuffly find one in Smith's desk, I expected he would half kill him, but he didn't do much to him, he only took the book away; and Lorraine says he never does beat them much for that, because he doesn't want them to leave off buying them, because he wants them himself. Don't tell the Woods this. Don't tell mother Jem and I cry, or else she'll be miserable. I don't so much mind the beatings (Lorraine says you get hard in time), nor the washing at the sink—nor the duff puddings—but it is such a beastly hole, and he is such an old brute, and I feel so dreadful I can't tell you. Give my love to Mrs. Wood and to Mr. Wood, and to Carlo and to Mary Anne, and to your dear dear self, and to Isaac when you see him.

And I am your affectionate friend,

JACK.

P.S. Jem sends his best love, and he's got two black eyes.

P.S. No. 2. You would be sorry for Lorraine if you knew him. Sometimes I'm afraid he'll kill himself, for he says there's really nothing in the Bible about suicide. So I said—killing yourself is as bad as killing anybody else. So he said—is stealing from yourself as bad as stealing from anybody else? And we had a regular *argue*, Some

of the boys argle-bargle on Sundays, he says, but most of them fight. When they differ, they put tin-tacks with the heads downwards on each other's places on the forms in school, and if they run into you and you scream, old Snuffy beats you. The milkman brings them, by the half ounce, with very sharp points, if you can pay him. Most of the boys are a horrid lot, and so dirty. Lorraine is as dirty as the rest, and I asked him why, and he said it was because he'd thrown up the sponge; but he got rather red, and he's washed himself cleaner this morning. He says he has an uncle in India, and some time ago he wrote to him, and told him about Crayshaw's, and gave the milkman a diamond pin, that had been his father's, and Snuffy didn't know about, to post it with plenty of stamps, but he thinks he can't have put plenty on, for no answer ever came. I've told him I'll post another one for him in the holidays. Don't say anything about this back in your letters. He reads 'em all.

—Monday. I've caught the milkman at last, he'll take it this evening. The lessons here are regular rubbish. I'm so glad I've a good knife, for if you have you can dig holes in your desk to put collections in. The boy next to me has earwigs, but you have to keep a look-out, or he puts them in your ears. I turned up a stone near the sink this morning, and got five woodlice for mine. It's considered a very good collection.

CHAPTER X.

"But none inquired how Peter used the rope,
Or what the bruise that made the stripling stoop;
None could the ridges on his back behold,
None sought him shivering in the winter's cold."

* * * * *

The pitying women raised a clamour round."

Crabbe, "*The Borough*."

A GREAT many people say that all suffering is good for one, and I am sure pain does improve one very often, and in many ways. It teaches one sympathy, it softens and it strengthens. But I cannot help thinking that there are some evil experiences which only harden and stain. The best I can say for what we endured at Crayshaw's is that it *was* experience, and so I suppose could not fail to teach one something, which, as Jem says, was "more than Snuffy did."

The affection with which I have heard men speak of their schooldays and schoolmasters makes me know that Mr. Crayshaw was not a common type of pedagogue. He was not a common type of man, happily; but I have met other specimens in

other parts of the world in which his leading quality was as fully developed, though their lives had nothing in common with his except the opportunities of irresponsible power.

The old wounds are scars now, it is long past and over, and I am grown up, and have roughed it in the world; but I say quite deliberately that I believe that Mr. Crayshaw was not merely a harsh man, uncultured and inconsiderate, having need and greed of money, taking pupils cheap, teaching them little or nothing, and keeping a kind of rough order with too much flogging,—but that the mischief of him was that he was possessed by a passion (not the less fierce because it was unnatural) which grew with indulgence and opportunity, as other passions grow, and that this was a passion for cruelty.

One does not rough it long in this wicked world without seeing more cruelty both towards human beings and towards animals than one cares to think about; but a large proportion of common cruelty comes of ignorance, bad tradition and uncultured sympathies. Some painful outbreaks of inhumanity, where one would least expect it, are no doubt strictly to be accounted for by disease. But over and above these common and these exceptional instances, one cannot escape the conviction that irresponsible power is opportunity in all hands and a direct temptation in some to cruelty, and that it affords horrible development to those morbid cases in which cruelty becomes a passion.

That there should ever come a thirst for blood in men as well as tigers, is bad enough but conceivable when linked with deadly struggle, or at the wild dictates of revenge. But a lust for cruelty growing fiercer by secret and unchecked indulgence, a hideous pleasure in seeing and inflicting pain, seems so inhuman a passion that we shrink from acknowledging that this is ever so.

And if it belonged to the past alone, to barbarous despotisms or to savage life, one might wisely forget it; for the dark pages of human history are unwholesome as well as unpleasant reading, unless the mind be very sane in a body very sound. But those in whose hands lie the destinies of the young and of the beasts who serve and love us, of the weak, the friendless, the sick and the insane, have not, alas! this excuse for ignoring the black records of man's abuse of power!

The records of its abuse in the savage who loads women's slender shoulders with his burdens, leaves his sick to the wayside jackal, and knocks his aged father on the head when he is past work; the brutality of slave-drivers, the iniquities of vice-maddened eastern despots;—such things

those who never have to deal with them may afford to forget.

But men who act for those who have no natural protectors, or have lost the power of protecting themselves, who legislate for those who have no voice in the making of laws, and for the brute creation, which we win to our love and domesticate for our convenience; who apprentice pauper boys and girls, who meddle with the matters of weak women, sick persons, and young children, are bound to face a far sadder issue. That even in these days, when human love again and again proves itself not only stronger than death, but stronger than all the selfish hopes of life; when the everyday manners of everyday men are concessions of courtesy to those who have not the strength to claim it; when children and pet animals are spoiled to grotesqueness; when the good deeds of priest and physician, nurse and teacher, surpass all earthly record of them—man, as man, is no more to be trusted with unchecked power than hitherto.

The secret histories of households, where power should be safest in the hands of love; of hospitals, of schools, of orphanages, of poorhouses, of lunatic-asylums, of religious communities founded for God's worship and man's pity, of institutions which assume the sacred title as well as the responsibilities of Home—from the single guardian of some rural idiot to the great society which bears the blessed Name of Jesus—have not each and all their dark stories, their hushed-up scandals, to prove how dire is the need of public opinion without, and of righteous care within, that what is well begun should be well continued?

If anyone doubts this, let him pause on each instance, one by one, and think of what he has seen, and heard, and read, and known of; and he will surely come to the conviction that human nature cannot, even in the very service of charity, be safely trusted with the secret exercise of irresponsible power, and that no light can be too fierce to beat upon and purify every spot where the weak are committed to the tender mercies of the consciences of the strong.

Mr. Crayshaw's conscience was not a tender one, and very little light came into his out-of-the-way establishment, and no check whatever upon his cruelty. It had various effects on the different boys. It killed one in my day, and the doctor (who had been "in a difficulty" some years back, over a matter through which Mr. Crayshaw helped him with bail and testimony) certified to heart disease, and we all had our pocket-handkerchiefs washed, and went to the funeral. And Snuffy had cards printed with a black edge, and several angels and a broken lily, and the hymn—

"Death has been here and borne away
A brother from our side;
Just in the morning of his day,
As young as we he died."

—and sent them to all the parents. But the pupils had to pay for the stamps. And my dear mother cried dreadfully, first because she was so sorry for the boy, and secondly because she ever had felt uncharitably towards Mr. Crayshaw.

Crayshaw's cruelty crushed others, it made liars and sneaks of boys naturally honest, and it produced in Lorraine an unchildlike despair that was almost grand, so far as the spirit above the flesh in him. But I think its commonest and strangest result was to make the boys bully each other.

One of the least cruel of the tyrannies the big boys put upon the little ones, sometimes bore very hardly on those who were not strong. They used to ride races on our backs and have desperate mounted battles and tournaments. In many a playground and home since then I have seen boys tilt and race, and steeplechase, with smaller boys upon their backs, and plenty of wholesome rough-and-tumble in the game; and it has given me a twinge of heartache to think how, even when we were at play, Crayshaw's baneful spirit cursed us with its example, so that the big and strong could not be happy except at the expense of the little and weak.

For it was the big ones who rode the little ones, with neatly-cut ash-sticks and clumsy spurs. I can see them now, with the thin legs of the small boys tottering under them, like a young donkey overriden by a coalheaver.

I was a favourite horse, for I was active and nimble, and (which was more to the point) well made. It was the shambling, ill-proportioned lads who suffered most. The biggest boy in school rode me, as a rule, but he was not at all a bad bully, so I was lucky. He never spurred me, and he boasted of my willingness and good paces. I am sure he did not know, I don't suppose he ever stopped to think, how bad it was for me, or what an aching lump of prostration I felt when it was over. The day I fainted after winning a steeplechase, he turned a bucket of cold water over me, and as this roused me into a tingling vitality of pain, he was quite proud of his treatment, and told me nothing brought a really good horse round after a hard day like a bucket of clean water. And (so much are we the creatures of our conditions!) I remember feeling something approaching to satisfaction at the reflection that I had "gone till I dropped," and had been brought round after the manner of the best-conducted stables.

It was not that that made Jem and me run away. (For we did run away.) Overstrain and collapse,

ill-usage short of torture, hard living and short commons, one got a certain accustomedness to, according to the merciful law which within certain limits makes a second nature for us out of use and wont. The one pain that knew no pause, and allowed of no revival, the evil that overbore us, mind and body, was the evil of constant dread. Upon us little boys fear lay always, and the terror of it was that it was uncertain. What would come next, and from whom, we never knew.

It was I who settled we should run away. I did it the night that Jem gave in, and would do nothing but cry noiselessly into his sleeve and wish he was dead. So I settled it and told Lorraine. I wanted him to come too, but he would not. He pretended that he did not care, and he said he had nowhere to go to. But he got into Snuffy's very own room at daybreak whilst we stood outside and heard him snoring; and very loud he must have snored too, for I could hear my heart thumping so I should not have thought I could have heard anything else. And Lorraine took the back-door key off the drawers, and let us out, and took it back again. He feared nothing. There was a walnut-tree by the gate, and Jem said, "Suppose we do our faces like gipsies, so that nobody may know us." (For Jem was terribly frightened of being taken back.) So we found some old bits of peel and rubbed our cheeks, but we dared not linger long over it, and I said, "We'd better get further on, and we can hide if we hear steps or wheels." So we took each other's hands, and for nearly a mile we ran as hard as we could go, looking back now and then over our shoulders, like the picture of Christian and Hopeful running away from the Castle of Giant Despair.

We were particularly afraid of the milkman, for milkmen drive about early, and he had taken a runaway boy back to Crayshaw's years before, and Snuffy gave him five shillings. They said he once helped another boy to get away, but it was a big one, who gave him his gold watch. He would do anything if you paid him. Jem and I had each a little bundle in a handkerchief, but nothing in them that the milkman would have cared for. We managed very well, for we got behind a wall when he went by, and I felt so much cheered up I thought we should get home that day, far as it was. But when we got back into the road, I found that Jem was limping, for Snuffy had stamped on his foot when Jem had had it stuck out beyond the desk, when he was writing; and the running had made it worse, and at last he sat down by the roadside, and said I was to go on home and send back for him. It was not very likely I would leave him to the chance of being pursued by Mr. Crayshaw; but there he sat, and

I thought I never should have persuaded him to get on my back, for good-natured as he is, Jem is as obstinate as a pig. But I said, "What's the use of my having been first horse with the heaviest weight in school, if I can't carry you?" So he got up and I carried him a long way, and then a cart overtook us, and we got a lift home. And they knew us quite well, which shows how little use walnut-juice is, and it is disgusting to get off.

I think, as it happened, it was very unfortunate that we had discoloured our faces; for though my mother was horrified at our being so thin and pinched-looking, my father said that of course we looked frights with brown daubs all over our cheeks and necks. But then he never did notice people looking ill. He was very angry indeed, at first, about our running away, and would not listen to what we said. He was angry too with my dear mother, because she believed us, and called Snuffy a bad man and a brute. And he ordered the dog-cart to be brought round, and said that Martha was to give us some breakfast, and that we might be thankful to get that instead of a flogging, for that when he ran away from school to escape a thrashing, his father gave him one thrashing while the dog-cart was being brought round, and drove him straight back to school, where the schoolmaster gave him another.

"And a very good thing for me," said my father, buttoning his coat, whilst my mother and Martha went about crying, and Jem and I stood silent. If we were to go back, the more we told, the worse would be Snuffy's revenge. An unpleasant hardness was beginning to creep over me. "The next time I run away," was my thought, "I shall not run home." But with this came a rush of regret for Jem's sake. I knew that "Crayshaw's" did more harm to him than to me, and almost involuntarily I put my arms round him, thinking that if they would only let him stay, I could go back and bear anything, like Lewis Lorraine. Jem had been crying, and when he hid his face on my shoulder, and leaned against me, I thought it was for comfort, but he got heavier and heavier, till I called out, and he rolled from my arms and was caught in my father's. He had been standing about on the bad foot, and pain and weariness and hunger and fright overpowered him, and he had fainted.

The dog-cart was counter-ordered, and Jem was put to bed, and Martha served me a breakfast that would have served six full-grown men. I ate far more than satisfied me, but far less than satisfied Martha, who seemed to hope that cold fowl and boiled eggs, fried bacon and pickled beef, plain cakes and currant cakes, jam and marmalade, buttered toast, strong tea and unlimited sugar and



"So we took each other's hands, and for nearly a mile we ran as hard as we could go." (P. 39.)

and yellow cream; would atone for the past in proportion to the amount I ate, if it did not fatten me under her eyes. I really think I spent the rest of the day in stupor. I am sure it was not till the following morning that I learned the decision to which my father had come about us.

Jem was too obviously ill to be anywhere at

present but at home; and my father decided that he would not send him back to Crayshaw's at all, but to a much more expensive school in the south of England, to which the parson of our parish was sending one of his sons. I was to return to Crayshaw's at once; he could not afford the expensive school for us both, and Jem was the

eldest. Besides which, he was not going to countenance rebellion in any school to which he sent his sons, or to insult a man so highly recommended to him as Mr. Crayshaw had been. There certainly seemed to have been some severity, and the boys seemed to be a very rough lot; but Jem would fight, and if he gave he must take. His great-grandfather was just the same, and *he* fought the Putney Pet when he was five-and-twenty, and his parents thought he was sitting quietly at his desk in Fetter Lane.

I loved Jem too well to be jealous of him, but I was not the less conscious of the tender tone in which my father always spoke even of his faults, and of the way it stiffened and cooled when he added that I was not so ready with my fists, but that I was as fond of my own way as Jem was of a fight; but that setting up for being unlike other people didn't do for school life, and that the Woods had done me no kindness by making a fool of me. He added, however, that he should request Mr. Crayshaw, as a personal favour, that I should receive no punishment for running away, as I had suffered sufficiently already.

We had told very little of the true history of Crayshaw's before Jem fainted, and I felt no disposition to further confidences. I took as cheerful a farewell of my mother as I could, for her sake; and put on a good deal of swagger and "don't care" to console Jem. He said, "You're as plucky as Lorraine," and then his eyes shut again. He was too ill to think much, and I kissed his head and left him. After which I got stoutly into the dog-cart, and we drove back up the dreary hills down which Jem and I had run away.

That Snuffy was bland to cringing before my father did not give me a hope that I should escape his direst revenge; and the expression of Lorraine's face showed me, by its sympathy, what *he* expected. But we were both wrong, and for reasons which we then knew nothing about.

Cruelty was, as I have said, Mr. Crayshaw's ruling passion, but it was not his only vice. There was a whispered tradition that he had once been in jail for a misuse of his acquirements in the art of penmanship; and if you heard his name cropping up in the confidential conversation of such neighbours as small farmers, the postman, the parish overseer, and the like, it was sure to be linked with unpleasantly suggestive expressions, such as—"a dirty bit of business," "a nasty job that," "an awkward affair," "very near got into trouble," "a bit of bother about it, but Driver and Quills pulled him through; theirs isn't a nice business, and they're men of t' same feather as Crayshaw, so I reckon they're friends." Many

such hints have I heard, for the "White Lion" was next door to the sweetshop, and in summer, refreshment of a sober kind, with conversation to match, was apt to be enjoyed on the benches outside. The good wives of the neighbourhood used no such euphuisms as their more prudent husbands, when they spoke of Crayshaw's. Indeed one of the whispered anecdotes of Snuffy's past was of a hushed-up story that was just saved from becoming a scandal, but in reference to which Mr. Crayshaw was even more narrowly saved from a crowd of women who had taken the too-tardy law into their own hands. I remember myself the retreat of an unpaid washerwoman from the back premises of Crayshaw's on one occasion, and the unmistakable terms in which she expressed her opinions.

"Don't tell me! I know Crayshaw's well enough; such folks is a curse to a country side, but judgment overtakes 'em at last."

"Judgment," as the good woman worded it, kept threatening Mr. Crayshaw long before it overtook him, as it is apt to disturb scoundrels who keep a hypocritical good name above their hidden misdeeds. As it happened, at the very time Jem and I ran away from him, Mr. Crayshaw himself was living in terror of one or two revelations, and to be deserted by two of his most respectably connected boys was an ill-timed misfortune. The countenance my father had been so mistaken as to afford to his establishment was very important to him, for we were the only pupils from within fifty miles, and our parents' good word constituted an "unexceptionable reference."

Thus it was that Snuffy pleaded humbly (but in vain) for the return of Jem, and that he not only promised that I should not suffer, but to my amazement kept his word.

Judgment lingered over the head of Crayshaw's for two years longer, and I really think my being there had something to do with maintaining its tottering reputation. I was almost the only lad in the school whose parents were alive and at hand and in a good position, and my father's name stifled scandal. Most of the others were orphans, being cheaply educated by distant relatives or guardians, or else the sons of poor widows who were easily bamboozled by Snuffy's fluent letters, and the religious leaflets which it was his custom to enclose. (In several of these cases, he was "managing" the poor women's "affairs" for them.) One or two boys belonged to people living abroad. Indeed, the worst bully in the school was a half-caste, whose smile, when he showed his gleaming teeth, boded worse than any other boy's frown. He was a wonderful acrobat, and could do extraordinary tricks of all sorts. My

being nimble and ready made me very useful to him as a confederate in the exhibitions which his intense vanity delighted to give on half-holidays, and kept me in his good graces till I was old enough to take care of myself. Oh, how every boy who dreaded him applauded at these entertainments! And what dangerous feats I performed, every other fear being lost in the fear of him! I owe him no grudge for what he forced me to do (though I have had to bear real fire without flinching when he failed in a conjuring-trick, which should only have simulated the real thing); what I learned from him has come in so useful since, that I forgive him all.

I was there for two years longer. Snuffy bullied me less, and hated me the more. I knew it, and he knew that I knew it. It was a hateful life, but I am sure the influence of a good home holds one up in very evil paths. Every time we went back to our respective schools my father gave us ten shillings, and told us to mind our books, and my mother kissed us and made us promise we would say our prayers every day. I could not bear to break my promise, though I used to say them in bed (the old form we learnt from her), and often in such a very unfit frame of mind, that they were what it is very easy to call "a mockery."

GOD knows (Who alone knows the conditions under which each soul blunders and spells on through life's hard lessons) if they were a mockery. I know they were unworthy to be offered to Him, but that the habit helped to keep me straight I am equally sure. Then I had a good home to go to during the holidays. That was everything, and it is in all humbleness that I say that I do not think the ill experiences of those years degraded me much. I managed to keep some truth and tenderness about me; and I am thankful to remember that I no more cringed to Crayshaw than Lorraine did, and that though I stayed there till I was a big boy, I never maltreated a little one.

CHAPTER XI.

"Whose powers shed round him in the common strife
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;

Or if an unexpected call succeed,
Come when it will, is equal to the need."

Wordsworth's "Happy Warrior."

JUDGMENT came at last. During my first holidays I had posted a letter from Lewis Lorraine to the uncle in India to whom he had before endeavoured to appeal. The envelope did

not lack stamps, but the address was very imperfect, and it was many months in reaching him. He wrote a letter, which Lewis never received, Mr. Crayshaw probably knew why. But twelve months after that Colonel Jervois came to England, and he lost no time in betaking himself to Crayshaw's. From Crayshaw's he came to my father, the only "unexceptionable reference" left to Snuffy to put forward.

The Colonel came with a soldier's promptness, and, with the utmost courtesy of manner, went straight to the point. His life had not accustomed him to our neighbourly unwillingness to interfere with anything that did not personally concern us, nor to the prudent patience with which country folk will wink long at local evils. In the upshot what he asked was what my mother had asked three years before. Had my father personal knowledge or good authority for believing the school to be a well-conducted one, and Mr. Crayshaw a fit man for his responsible post? Had he ever heard rumours to the man's discredit?

Replies that must do for a wife will not always answer a man who puts the same questions. My great-grandfather's memory was not evoked on this occasion, and my father frankly confessed that his personal knowledge of Crayshaw's was very small, and that the man on whose recommendation he had sent us to school there had just proved to be a rascal and a swindler. Our mother had certainly heard rumours of severity, but he had regarded her maternal anxiety as excessive, etc., etc. In short, my dear father saw that he had been wrong, and confessed it, and was now as ready as the Colonel to expose Snuffy's misdeeds.

No elaborate investigation was needed. An attack once made on Mr. Crayshaw's hollow reputation, it cracked on every side; first hints crept out, then scandals flew. The Colonel gave no quarter, and he did not limit his interest to his own nephew.

"A widow's son, ma'am," so he said to my mother, bowing over her hand as he led her in to dinner, in a style to which we were quite unaccustomed; "a widow's son, ma'am, should find a father in every honest man who can assist him."

The tide having turned against Snuffy, his friends (of the Driver and Quills type) turned with it. But they gained nothing, for one morning he got up as early as we had done, and ran away, and I never heard of him again. And before nightfall the neighbours, who had so long tolerated his wickedness, broke every pane of glass in his windows.

During all this, Lewis Lorraine and his uncle stayed at our house. The Colonel spent his time between holding indignant investigations, writing

indignant letters (which he allowed us to seal with his huge signet), and walking backwards and forwards to the town to buy presents for the little boys.

When Snuffy ran away, and the school was left to itself, Colonel Jervois strode off to the nearest farm, requisitioned a waggon, and having packed the boys into it, bought loaves and milk enough to breakfast them all, and transported the whole twenty-eight to our door. He left four with my mother, and marched off with the rest. The Woods took in a large batch, and in the course of the afternoon he had for love or money quartered them all. He betrayed no nervousness in dealing with numbers, in foraging for supplies, or in asking for what he wanted. Whilst other people had been doubting whether it might not "create unpleasantness" to interfere in this case and that, the Colonel had fought each boy's battle, and seen most of them off on their homeward journeys. He was used to dealing with men, and with emergencies, and it puzzled him when my Uncle Henry consulted his law-books and advised caution, and my father saw his agent on farm business, whilst the fate of one of Crayshaw's victims yet hung in the balance.

When all was over the Colonel left us, and took Lewis with him, and his departure raised curiously mixed feelings of regret and relief.

He had quite won my mother's heart, chiefly by his energy and tenderness for the poor boys, and partly by his kindly courtesy and deference towards her. Indeed all ladies liked him—all, that is, who knew him. Before they came under the influence of his pleasantness and politeness, he shared the half-hostile reception to which any person or anything that was foreign to our daily experience was subjected in our neighbourhood. So that the first time Colonel Jervois appeared in our pew, Mrs. Simpson (the wife of a well-to-do man of business who lived near us) said to my mother after church, "I see you've got one of the military with you," and her tone was more critical than congratulatory. But when my mother, with unconscious diplomacy, had kept her to luncheon, and the Colonel had handed her to her seat, and had stroked his moustache, and asked in his best manner if she meant to devote her son to the service of his country, Mrs. Simpson undid her bonnet-strings, fairly turned her back on my father, and was quite unconscious when Martha handed the potatoes; and she left us wreathed in smiles, and resolved that Mr. Simpson should buy their son Horace a commission instead of taking him into the business. Mr. Simpson did not share her views, and I believe he said some rather nasty things about swaggering, and not having one six-

pence to rub against another. And Mrs. Simpson (who was really devoted to Horace and could hardly bear him out of her sight) reflected that it was possible to get shot as well as to grow a moustache if you went into the army; but she still maintained that she should always remember the Colonel as a thorough gentleman, and a wonderful judge of the character of boys.

The Colonel made great friends with the Woods, and he was deeply admired by our rector, who, like many parsons, had a very military heart, and delighted in exciting tales of the wide world which he could never explore. It was perhaps natural that my father should hardly be devoted to a stranger who had practically reproached his negligence, but the one thing that did draw him towards the old Indian officer was his habit of early rising. My father was always up before any of us, but he generally found the Colonel out before him, enjoying the early hours of the day as men who have lived in hot climates are accustomed to do. They used to come in together in very pleasant moods to breakfast; but with the post-bag Lorraine's uncle was sure to be moved to voluble indignation, or pity, or to Utopian plans to which my father listened with puzzled impatience. He did not understand the Colonel, which was perhaps not to be wondered at.

His moral courage had taken away our breath, and physical courage was stamped upon his outward man. If he was anything he was manly. It was because he was in some respects very womanly too, that he puzzled my father's purely masculine brain. The mixture, and the vehemence of the mixture, were not in his line. He would have turned "Crayshaw's" matters over in his own mind as often as hay in a wet season before grappling with the whole bad business as the Colonel had done. And on the other hand, it made him feel uncomfortable and almost ashamed to see tears standing in the old soldier's eyes as he passionately blamed himself for what had been suffered by "my sister's son."

The servants one and all adored Colonel Jervois. They are rather acute judges of good breeding, and men and maids were at one on the fact that he was a visitor who conferred social distinction on the establishment. They had decided that we should "dine late so long as The Gentleman" was with us, whilst my mother was thinking how to break so weighty an innovation to such valuable servants. They served him with alacrity, and approved of his brief orders and gracious thanks. The Colonel did unheard-of things with impunity—threw open his bed-room shutters at night, and more than once unbarred and unbolted the front door to go outside for a late cigar. No-

thing puzzled Martha more than the nattiness with which he put all the bolts and bars back into their places, as if he had been used to the door as long as she had.

Indeed he had all that power of making himself at home, which is most fully acquired by having had to provide for yourself in strange places, but he carried it too far.

One day he penetrated into the kitchen (having previously been rummaging the kitchen-garden) and insisted upon teaching our cook how to make curry. The lesson was much needed, and it was equally well intended, but it was a mistake. Everything cannot be carried by storm, whatever the military may think. Jane said, "Yes, sir," at every point that approached to a pause in the Colonel's ample instructions, but she never moved her eyes from the magnificent moustache which drooped above the stew-pan, nor her thoughts from the one idea produced by the occasion—that The Gentleman had caught her without her cap. In short our curries were no worse, and no better, in consequence of the shock to kitchen-etiquette (for that was all) which she received.

And yet we modified our household ways for him, as they were never modified for anyone else. On Martha's weekly festival for cleaning the bedrooms (and if a room was occupied for a night, she scrubbed after the intruder as if he had brought the plague in his portmanteau) the smartest visitor we ever entertained had to pick his or her way through the upper regions of the house, where soap and soda were wafted on high and unexpected breezes along passages filled with washstands and clothes-baskets, cane-seated chairs and baths, mops, pails and brooms. But the Colonel had "given such a jump" on meeting a towel-horse at large round a sharp corner, and had seemed so uncomfortable on finding everything that he thought was inside his room turned outside, that for that week Martha left the lower part of the house uncleaned, and did not turn either the dining or drawing rooms into the hall on their appointed days. She had her revenge when he was gone.

On the day of his departure, my lamentations had met with the warmest sympathy as I stirred toffy over Jane's kitchen fire, whilst Martha lingered with the breakfast things, after a fashion very unusual with her, and gazed at the toast-rack and said, "the Colonel had eaten nothing of a breakfast to travel on." But next morning, I met her in another mood. It was a mood to which we were not strangers, though it did not often occur. In brief, Martha (like many another invaluable domestic) "had a temper of her own;" but to do her justice her ill feelings generally expended themselves in a rage for work, and in taking as

little ease herself as she allowed to other people. I knew what it meant when I found her cleaning the best silver when she ought to have been eating her breakfast; but my head was so full of the Colonel, that I could not help talking about him, even if the temptation to tease Martha had not been overwhelming. No reply could I extract; only once, as she passed swiftly to the china cupboard, with the whole Crown Derby tea and coffee service on one big tray (the Colonel had praised her coffee), I heard her mutter—"Soldiers is very upsetting." Certainly, considering what she did in the way of scolding, scouring, black-leading, polishing and sand-papering that week, it was not Martha's fault if we did not "get straight again," furniture and feelings. I've heard her say that Calais sand would "fetch anything off," and I think it had fetched the Colonel off her heart by the time that the cleaning was done.

It had no such effect on mine. Lewis Lorraine himself did not worship his uncle more devoutly than I. Colonel Jervois had given me a new ideal. It was possible, then, to be enthusiastic without being unmanly; to live years out of England, and come back more patriotic than many people who stayed comfortably at home; to go forth into the world and be the simpler as well as the wiser, the softer as well as the stronger for the experience? So it seemed. And yet Lewis had told me, with such tears as Snuffy never made him shed, how tender his uncle was to his unworthiness, what allowances he made for the worst that Lewis could say of himself, and what hope he gave him of a good and happy future.

"He cried as bad as I did," Lewis said, "and begged me to forgive him for having trusted so much to my other guardian. Do you know, Jack, Snuffy regularly forged a letter like my handwriting, to answer that one Uncle Eustace wrote, which he kept back? He might well do such good copies, and write the year of Our Lord with a swan at the end of the last flourish? And you remember what we heard about his having been in prison—but, oh, dear! I don't want to remember. He says I am to forget, and he forbade me to talk about Crayshaw's, and said I was not to trouble my head about anything that had happened there. He kept saying, 'Forget, my boy, forget! Say God help me, and look forward. While there's life there's always the chance of a better life for everyone. Forget! forget!'"

Lewis departed with his uncle. Charlie went for two nights to the moors. Jem's holidays had not begun, and in our house we were "cleaning down" after the Colonel as if he had been the sweeps.

I went to old Isaac for sympathy. He had

become very rheumatic the last two years, but he was as intelligent as ever, and into his willing ear I poured all that I could tell of my hero, and much that I only imagined.

His sympathy met me more than half-way. The villagers as a body were unbounded in their approval of the Colonel, and Mrs. Irvine was even greedier than old Isaac for every particular I could impart respecting him.

"He's a *handsome* gentleman," said the bee-master's wife, "and he passed us (my neighbour, Mrs. Mettam, and me) as near, sir, as I am to you, with a gold-headed stick in his hand, and them lads following after him, for all the world like the Good Shepherd and his flock."

I managed not to laugh, and old Isaac added, "There's a many in this village, sir, would have been glad to have taken the liberty of expressing themselves to the Colonel, and a *deputation* did get as far as your father's gates one night, but they turned bashful and come home again. And I know, for one, Master Jack, that if me and my missus had had a room fit to offer one of them poor young gentlemen, I'd have given a week's wage to do it, and the old woman would have been happy to her dying day."

CHAPTER XII.

"God help me! save I take my part
Of danger on the roaring sea,
A devil rises in my heart,
Far worse than any death to me."
Tennyson's "Sailor-boy."

THE fact that my father had sent me back against my will to a school where I had suffered so much and learnt so little, ought perhaps to have drawn us together when he discovered his mistake. Unfortunately it did not. He was deeply annoyed with himself for having been taken in by Snuffy, but he transferred some of this annoyance to me, on grounds which cut me to the soul, and which I fear I resented so much that I was not in a mood that was favourable to producing a better understanding between us. The injustice which I felt so keenly was, that my father reproached me with having what he called "kept him in the dark" about the life at Crayshaw's. At my age I must have seen how wicked the man and his system were.

I reminded him that I had run away from them once, and had told all that I dared, but that he would not hear me then. He would not hear me now.

"I don't wish to discuss the subject. It is a very painful one," he said (and I believe it was as physically distressing to him as the thought of Cripple Charlie's malformation). "I have no wish to force your confidence when it is too late," he added (and it was this which I felt to be so hard). "I don't blame you; you have other friends who suit you better, but you have never been fully open with me. All I can say is, if Mr. Wood was better informed than I have been, and did not acquaint me, he has behaved in a manner which—. There—don't speak! we'll dismiss the subject. You have suffered enough, if you have not acted as I should have expected you to act. I blame myself unutterably, and I hope I see my way to such a comfortable and respectable start in life for you that these three years in that vile place may not be to your permanent disadvantage."

I was just opening my lips to thank him, when he got up and went to his tall desk, where he took a pinch of snuff, and then added as he turned away, "Thank GOD I have *one* son who is frank with his father!"

My lips were sealed in an instant. This, then, was my reward for that hard journey of escape, with Jem on my back, which had only saved him; for having stifled envy in gladness for his sake, when (in those bits of our different holidays which overlapped each other) I saw and felt the contrast between our opportunities; for having suffered my harder lot in silence that my mother might not fret, when I felt certain that my father would not interfere! My heart beat as if it would have pumped the tears into my eyes by main force, but I kept them back, and said steadily enough, "Is that all, sir?"

My father did not look up, but he nodded his head and said, "Yes; you may go."

As I went he called me back.

"Are you going to the farm this afternoon?"

To my own infinite annoyance I blushed as I answered, "I was going to sit with Charlie a bit, unless you have any objection."

"Not at all. I only asked for information. I have no wish to interfere with any respectable friends you may be disposed to give your confidence to. But I should like it to be understood that either your mother or I must have some knowledge of your movements."

"Mother knew quite well I was going!" I exclaimed. "Why, I've got a parcel to take to Mrs. Wood from her." "Very good. There's no occasion to display temper. Shut the door after you."

I shut it very gently. (If three years at Crayshaw's had taught me nothing else, it had taught me

much self-control.) Then I got away to the first hiding-place I could find, and buried my head upon my arms. Would not a beating from Snuffy have been less hard to bear? Surely sore bones from those one despises are not so painful as a sore heart from those one loves.

Our household affections were too sound at the core for the mere fact of displeasing my father not to weigh heavily on my soul. But I could not help defending myself in my own mind against what I knew to be injustice.

Jem "frank with his father"? Well he might be, when our father's partiality met him half way at every turn. *That* was no fancy of mine. I had the clearest of childish remembrances on an occasion when I wanted to do something which our farming man thought my father would not approve, and how when I urged the fact that Jem had already done it with impunity, he shook his head wisely, and said, "Aye, aye, Master Jack. But ye know they say some folk may steal a horse, when other folks mayn't look over the hedge."

The vagueness of "some folks" and "other folks" had left the proverb dark to my understanding when I heard it, but I remembered it till I understood it.

I never was really jealous of Jem. He was far too good-natured and unspoilt, and I was too fond of him. Besides which, if the mental tone of our country lives was at rather a dull level, it was also wholesomely unfavourable to the cultivation of morbid grievances, or the dissection of one's own hurt feelings. If I had told anybody about me, from my dear mother down to our farming-man, that I was misunderstood and wanted sympathy, I should probably have been answered that many a lad of my age was homeless and wanted boots. As a matter of reasoning the reply would have been defective, but for practical purposes it would have been much to the point. And it is fair to this rough-and-ready sort of philosophy to defend it from a common charge of selfishness. It was not that I should have been the happier because another lad was miserable, but that an awakened sympathy with his harder fate would tend to dwarf egotistic absorption in my own. Such considerations, in short, are no justification of those who are responsible for needless evil or neglected good, but they are handy helps to those who suffer from them, and who feel sadly sorry for themselves.

I am sure the early-begun and oft-reiterated teaching of daily thankfulness for daily blessing was very useful to me at Crayshaw's and has been useful to me ever since. With my dear mother herself it was merely part of that pure and constant piety which ran through her daily life, like a stream that is never frozen and never runs dry. In me it

had no such grace, but it was an early-taught good habit (as instinctive as any bodily habit) to feel—"Well, I'm thankful things are not so with me;" as quickly as "Ah, it might have been thus!" Looking at the fates and fortunes and dispositions of other boys, I had, even at Snuffy's "much to be thankful for" as well as much to endure, and it was a good thing for me that I could balance the two. For if the grace of thankfulness does not solve the riddles of life, it lends a willing shoulder to its common burdens.

I certainly had needed all my philosophy at home as well as at school. It was hard to come back, one holiday-time after another, ignorant except for books that I devoured in the holidays, and for my own independent studies of maps, and an old geography book at Snuffy's from which I was allowed to give lessons to the lowest form; rough in looks, and dress, and manners (I knew it, but it requires some self-respect even to use a nail-brush, and self-respect was next door to impossible at Crayshaw's); and with my north-country accent deepened, and my conversation disfigured by slang which, not being fashionable slang, was as inadmissible as thieves' lingo. It was hard, I say, to come back thus, and meet dear old Jem, and generally one at least of his schoolfellows whom he had asked to be allowed to invite—both of them well dressed, well cared for, and well mannered, full of games that were not in fashion at Crayshaw's, and slang as "correct" as it was unintelligible.

Jem's heart was as true to me as ever, but he was not so thin-skinned as I am. He was never a fellow who worried himself much about anything, and I don't think it struck him I could feel hurt or lonely. He would say, "I say, Jack, what a beastly way your hair is cut. I wish Father would let you come to our school:" or, "Don't say it was a dirty trick—say it was a beastly chouse, or something of that sort. We're awfully particular about talking at —'s, and I don't want Cholmondley to hear you."

Jem was wonderfully polished-up himself, and as pugnacious on behalf of all the institutions of his school as he had once been about our pond. I got my hair as near right as one cutting and the town hair-cutter could bring it, and mended my manners and held my own with good temper. When it came to feats of skill or endurance, I more than held my own. Indeed, I so amazed one very "swell" little friend of Jem's whose mother (a titled lady) had allowed him to spend part of the summer holidays with Jem for change of air, that he vowed I must go and stay with him in the winter, and do juggler and acrobat at their Christmas theatricals. But he may have reported me as being rough as well as ready, for her ladyship never

ratified the invitation. Not that I would have left home at Christmas, and not that I lacked pleasure in the holidays. But other fashions of games and speech and boyish etiquette lay between me and Jem; hospitality, if not choice, kept him closely with his schoolfellows, and neither they nor he had part in the day-dreams of my soul.

For the spell of the Penny Numbers had not grown weaker as I grew older. In the holidays I came back to them as to friends. At school they made the faded maps on Snuffy's dirty walls alive with visions, and many a night as I lay awake with pain and over-weariness in the stifling dormitory, my thoughts took refuge not in dreams of home nor in castles of the air, but in phantom ships that sailed for ever round the world.

The day of the interview with my father I roused myself from my grievances to consider a more practical question. Why should I not go to sea? No matter whose fault it was, there was no doubt that I was ill-educated, and that I did not please my father as Jem did. On the other hand I was strong and hardy, nimble and willing to obey; and I had roughed it enough, in all conscience. I must have ill-luck indeed, if I lit upon a captain more cruel than Mr. Crayshaw. I did not know exactly how it was to be accomplished, but I knew enough to know that I could not aim at the Royal Navy. Of course I should have preferred it. I had never seen naval officers, but if they were like officers in the army, like Colonel Jervois, for instance, it was with such a port and bearing that I would fain have carried myself when I grew up to be a man. I guessed, however, that money and many other considerations might make it impossible for me to be a midshipman; but I had heard of boys being apprenticed to merchant-vessels, and I resolved to ask my father if he would so apprentice me.

He refused, and he accompanied his refusal with an unfavourable commentary on my character and conduct, which was not the less bitter because the accusations were chiefly general.

This sudden fancy for the sea—well, if it were not a sudden fancy, but a dream of my life, what a painful instance it afforded of my habitual want of frankness!—This long-concealed project which I had suddenly brought to the surface—I had talked about it to my mother years ago, had I, but it had distressed her, and even to my father, but he had snubbed me?—then I had been deliberately fostering aims and plans to which I had always known that my parents would be opposed. My father didn't believe a word of it. It was the old story. I must be peculiar at any price. I must have something new to amuse me, and be unlike the rest of the family. It was always the same. For years I had found more satisfaction from the

conversation of a man who had spent ten years of his life in the hulks than from that of my own father. Then this Indian Colonel had taken my fancy, and it had made him sick to see the womanish—he could call it no better, the *weak-womanish*—way in which I worshipped him. If I were a daughter instead of a son, my caprices would distress and astonish him less. He could have sent me to my mother, and my mother might have sent me to my needle. In a son, from whom he looked for manly feeling and good English common-sense, it was painful in the extreme. Vanity, the love of my own way, and want of candour—(my father took a pinch of snuff between each count of the indictment)—these were my besetting sins, and would lead me into serious trouble. This new fad, just, too, when he had made most favourable arrangements for my admission into my Uncle Henry's office as the first step in a prosperous career. I didn't know; didn't I? Perhaps not. Perhaps I had been at the Woods' when he and my mother were speaking of it. But now I did know. The matter was decided, and he hoped I should profit by my opportunities. I might go, and I was to shut the door after me.

I omit what my father said of the matter from a religious point of view, though he accused me of flying in the face of Providence as well as the Fifth Commandment. The piety which kept a pure and God-fearing atmosphere about my home, and to which I owe all the strength I have found against evil since I left it, was far too sincere in both my parents for me to speak of any phase of it with disrespect. Though I may say here that I think it is to be wished that more good people exercised judgment as well as faith in tracing the will of Heaven in their own. Practically I did not even then believe that I was more "called" to that station of life which was to be found in Uncle Henry's office, than to that station of life which I should find on board a vessel in the Merchant Service, and it only discredited truth in my inmost soul when my father put his plans for my career in that light. Just as I could not help feeling it unfair that a commandment which might have been fairly appealed to if I had disobeyed him, should be used against me in argument because I disagreed with him.

I did disagree with him utterly. Uncle Henry's office was a gloomy place, where I had had to endure long periods of waiting as a child when my mother took us in to the dentist, and had shopping and visiting of uncertain length to do. Uncle Henry himself was no favourite with me. He was harder than my father if you vexed him, and less genial when you didn't. And I wanted to go to

sea. But it did not seem a light matter to me to oppose my parents, and they were both against me. My dear mother was thrown into the profoundest distress by the bare notion. In her view to be at sea was merely to run an imminent and ceaseless risk of shipwreck; and even this jeopardy of life and limb was secondary to the dangers that going ashore in foreign places would bring upon my mind and morals.

So when my father spoke kindly to me at supper, and said that he had arranged with Mr. Wood that I should read with him for two hours every evening, in preparation for my future life as an articulated clerk, my heart was softened. I thanked him gratefully, and resolved for my own part to follow what seemed to be the plain path of duty, though it led to Uncle Henry's office, and not out into the world.

The capacity in which I began life in Uncle Henry's office was that of office boy, and the situation was attended in my case with many favourable conditions. Uncle Henry wished me to sleep on the premises, as my predecessor had done, but an accidental circumstance led to my coming home daily, which I infinitely preferred. This was nothing less than an outbreak of boils all over me, upon which every domestic application having failed, and gallons of herb tea only making me worse, Dr. Brown was called in, and pronounced my health in sore need of restoration. The regimen of Crayshaw's was not to be recovered from in a day, and the old doctor would not hear of my living altogether in the town. If I went to the office at all, he said, I must ride in early, and ride out in the evening. So much fresh air and exercise were imperative, and I must eat two solid meals a day under no less careful an eye than that of my mother.

She was delighted. She thought (even more than usual) that Doctor Brown was a very Solomon in spectacles, and I quite agreed with her. The few words that followed gave a slight shock to her favourable opinion of his wisdom, but I need hardly say that it confirmed mine.

He had given me a kindly slap on the shoulder, which happened at that moment to be the sorest point in my body, and I was in no small pain from head to foot. I only tightened my lips, but I suppose he bethought himself of what he had done, and he looked keenly at me and said, "You can bear pain, Master Jack?"

"Oh, Jack's a very brave boy," said my dear mother. "Indeed, he's only too brave. He upset his boots and he terribly last week by wanting to go to sea instead of to the office."

"And much better for him, ma'am," said the old doctor, promptly; "he'll make a first-rate

sailor, and if Crayshaw's is all the schooling he's had, a very indifferent clerk."

"That's just what I think!" I began, but my mother coloured crimson with distress, and I stopped, and went after her worsted ball which she had dropped, whilst she appealed to Doctor Brown.

"Pray don't say so, Doctor Brown. Jack is very good, and it's all quite decided. I couldn't part with him, and his father would be so annoyed if the subject——"

"Tut, tut, ma'am!" said the doctor, pocketing his spectacles; "I never interfere in family affairs, and I never repeat what I hear. The first rules of the profession, young gentleman, and very good general rules for anybody."

I got quite well again, and my new life began. I rode in and out of the town every day on Rob Roy, our red-haired pony. After tea I went to the farm to be taught by Mr. Wood, and at every opportunity I devoured such books as I could lay my hands on. I fear I had very little excuse for not being contented now. And yet I was not content.

It seems absurd to say that the drains had anything to do with it, but the horrible smell which pervaded the office added to the distastefulness of the place, and made us all feel ill and fretful, except my uncle, and Moses Benson, the Jew clerk. He was never ill, and he said he smelt nothing; which shows that one may have a very big nose to very little purpose.

My uncle pooh-poohed the unwholesome state of the office, for two reasons which certainly had some weight. The first was that he himself had been there for five and twenty years without suffering by it; and the second was, that the defects of drainage were so radical that (the place belonging to that period of house-building when the system of drainage was often worse than none at all) half the premises, if not half the street, would have to be pulled down for any effectual remedy. So it was left as it was, and when Mr. Burton, the head clerk, had worse headaches than usual, he used to give me sixpence for chloride of lime, which I distributed at my discretion, and on those days Moses Benson used generally to say that he "fancied he smelt something."

Moses Benson was an articulated clerk to my uncle, but he had no pretensions to be considered a gentleman. His father kept a small shop where second-hand watches were the most obvious goods; but the old man was said to have money, though the watches did not seem to sell very fast, and his son had duly qualified for his post, and had paid a good premium. Moses was only two or three years older than I, not that I could have told any-



"I got quite well again, and my new life began. I rode in and out of the town every day on Rob Roy, our red-haired pony." P. 48.

thing about his age from his looks. He was
sallow, and had a big nose; his hands were fat,
his feet were small, and I think his head was
large, but perhaps his hair made it look larger

than it was, for it was thick and very black, and
though it was curly, it was not like *Jem's*; the
curls were more like short ringlets, and if he bent
over his desk they hid his forehead, and when he

put his head back to think, they lay on his coat-collar. And I suppose it was partly because he could not smell with his nose, that he used such very strong hair-oil, and so much of it. It used to make his coat-collar in a horrid state, but he always kept a little bottle of "scouring drops" on the ledge of his desk, and when it got very bad, I knelt behind him on the corner of his stool and scoured his coat-collar with a little bit of flannel. Not that I did it half so well as he could. He wore very odd-looking clothes, but he took great care of them, and was always touching them up, and "reviving" his hat with one of Mrs. O'Flanagan's irons. He used to sell bottles of the scouring drops to the other clerks, and once he got me to get my mother to buy some. He gave me a good many little odd jobs to do for him, but he always thanked me, and from the beginning to the end of our acquaintance he was invariably kind.

I remember a very odd scene that happened at the beginning of it.

Mr. Burton (the other clerk, whose time was to expire the following year, which was to make a vacancy for me) was a very different man from Moses Benson. He was respectably connected, and looked down on "the Jew-boy," but he was hot-tempered, and rather slow-witted, and I think Moses could manage him; and I think it was he who kept their constant "tiffs" from coming to real quarrels.

One day, very soon after I began office-life, Benson sent me out to get him some fancy note-paper, and when I came back I saw the red-haired Mr. Burton standing by the desk and looking rather more sickly and cross than usual. I laid down the paper and the change, and asked if Benson wanted anything else. He thanked me exceedingly kindly, and said "No," and I went out of the enclosure and back to the corner where I had been cutting out some newspaper extracts for my uncle. At the same time I drew from under my overcoat which was lying there, an old railway volume of one of Cooper's novels which Charlie had lent me. I ought not to have been reading novels in office-hours, but I had had to stop short last night because my candle went out just at the most exciting point, and I had had no time to see what became of everybody before I started for town in the morning. I could bear suspense no longer, and plunged into my book.

How it was in these circumstances that I heard what the two clerks were saying, I don't know. They talked constantly in these open enclosures, when they knew I was within hearing. On this occasion I suppose they thought I had gone out, and it was some minutes before I discovered that

they were talking of me. Burton spoke first, and in an irritated tone.

"You treat this young shaver precious different to the last one."

The Jew spoke very softly, and with an occasional softening of the consonants in his words. "How observing you are!" said he.

Burton snorted. "It don't take much observation to see that. But I suppose you have your reasons. You Jews are always so sly. That's how you get on so, I suppose."

"You Gentiles," replied Moses (and the Jew's voice had tones which gave him an infinite advantage in retaliating scorn), "you Gentiles would do as well as we do if you were able to foresee and knew how to wait. You have all the selfishness for success, my dear, but the gifts of prophecy and patience are wanting to you."

"That's nothing to do with your little game about the boy," said Burton; "however, I suppose you can keep your own secrets."

"I have no secrets," said Moses gently. "And if you take my advice, you never will have. If you have no secrets, my dear, they will never be found out. If you tell your little designs, your best friends will be satisfied, and will not invent less creditable ones for you."

"If they did, you'd talk 'em down," said Burton roughly. "Short of a woman I never met such a hand at jaw. You'll be in Parliament yet—" ("It is possible!" said the Jew hastily,) "with that long tongue of yours. But you haven't told us about the boy, for all you've said."

"About this boy," said Moses, "a proverb will be shorter than my jaw. 'The son of the house is not a servant for ever.' As to the other—he was taken for charity and dismissed for theft, is it not so? He came from the dirt, and he went back to the dirt. They often do. Why should I be civil to him?"

What reply Mr. Burton would have made to this question I had no opportunity of judging. My uncle called him, and he ran hastily upstairs. And when he had gone, the Jew came slowly out, and crossed the office as if he were going into the street. By this time my conscience was pricking hard, and I shoved my book under my coat and called to him: "Mr. Benson."

"You?" he said.

"I am very sorry," I stammered, blushing, "but I heard what you were saying. I did not mean to listen. I thought you knew that I was there."

"It is of no importance," he said, turning away; "I have no secrets."

But I detained him.

"Mr. Benson! Tell me, please. You were

talking about me, weren't you? What did you mean about the son of the house not being a servant for ever?"

He hesitated for an instant, and then turned round and came nearer to me.

"It is true, is it not?" he said. "Next year you may be clerk. In time you may be your uncle's confidential clerk, which I should like to be myself. You may eventually be partner, as I should like to be; and in the long run you may succeed him, as I should like to do. It is a good business, my dear, a sound business, a business of which much, very much, more might be made. You might die rich, very rich. You might be mayor, you might be member, you might—but what is the use. *You will not.* You do not see it, though I am telling you. You will not wait for it, though it would come. What is that book you hid when I came in?"

"It is about North American Indians," said I, dragging it forth. "I am very sorry, but I left off last night at such an exciting bit."

The Jew was thumbing the pages, with his black ringlets close above them.

"Novels in office-hours!" said he; but he was very good-natured about it, and added, "I've one or two books at home, if you're fond of this kind of reading, and will promise me not to forget your duties."

"Oh, I promise!" said I.

"I'll put them under my desk in the corner," he said; "indeed, I would part with some of them for a trifle."

I thanked him warmly, but what he had said was still hanging in my mind, and I added, "Are there real prophets among the Jews nowadays, Mr. Benson?"

"They will make nothing by it, if there are," said he; and there was a tone of mysteriousness in his manner of speaking which roused my romantic curiosity. "A few of ush (very few, my dear!) mould our own fates, and the lives of the rest are moulded by what men have within them rather than by what they find without. If there were a true prophet in every market-place to tell each man of his future, it would not alter the destinies of seven men in thish wide world."

As Moses spoke the swing door was pushed open, and one of my uncle's clients entered. He was an influential man, and a very tall one. The Jew bent his ringlets before him, almost beneath his elbow, and slipped out as he came in.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Then, hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away!
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day."

C. Kingsley.

MOSES BENSON was as good as his word in the matter of books of adventure. Dirty books, some without backs, and some with very greasy ones (for which, if I bought them, I seldom paid more than half-price), but full of dangers and discoveries, the mightiness of manhood, and the wonders of the world. I read them at odd moments of my working hours, and dreamed of them when I went home to bed. And it was more fascinating still to look out, with Charlie's help, in the Penny Numbers, for the foreign places, and people, and creatures mentioned in the tales, and to find that the truth was often stranger than the fiction.

To live a fancy-life of adventure in my own head, was not merely an amusement to me at this time—it was a refuge. Matters did not really improve between me and my father, though I had obeyed his wishes. It was by his arrangement that I spent so much of my time at home with the Woods, and yet it remained a grievance that I liked to do so. Whether my dear mother had given up all hopes of my becoming a genius I do not know, but my father's contempt for my absorption in a book was unabated. I felt this if he came suddenly upon me with my head in my hands and my nose in a tattered volume; and if I went on with my reading it was with a sense of being in the wrong, whilst if I shut up the book and tried to throw myself into outside interests, my father's manner showed me that my efforts had only discredited my candour.

As is commonly the case, it was chiefly little things that pulled the wrong way of the stuff of life between us, but they pulled it very much askew. I was selfishly absorbed in my own dreams, and I think my dear father made a mistake which is a too common bit of tyranny between people who love each other and live together. He was not satisfied with my *doing* what he liked, he expected me to *be* what he liked, that is, to be another person instead of myself. Wives and daughters seem now and then to respond to this expectation as to the call of duty, and to become inconsistent echoes, odd mixtures of severity and hesitancy, hypocrites on the highest grounds; but sons are not often so self-effacing, and it was not the case with me. It was so much the case with

my dear mother, that she never was of the slightest use (which she might have been) when my father and I misunderstood each other. By my father's views of the moment she always hastily set her own, whether they were fair or unfair to me; and she made up for it by indulging me at every point that did not cross an expressed wish of my father's, or that could not annoy him because he was not there. She never held the scales between us.

And yet it was the thought of her which kept me from taking my fate into my own hands again and again. To have obeyed my father seemed to have done so little towards making him satisfied with me, that I found no consolation at home for the distastefulness of the office; and more than once I resolved to run away, and either enlist or go to Liverpool (which was at no great distance from us) and get on board some vessel that was about to sail for other lands. But when I thought of my mother's distress, I could not face it, and I let my half-formed projects slide again.

Oddly enough, it was Uncle Henry who brought matters to a crisis. I think my father was disappointed (though he did not blame me) that I secured no warmer a place in Uncle Henry's affections than I did. Uncle Henry had no children, and if he took a fancy to me and I pleased him, such a career as the Jew-clerk had sketched for me would probably be mine. This dawned on me by degrees through chance remarks from my father and the more open comments of friends. For good manners with us were not of a sensitively refined order, and to be clapped on the back with—"Well, Jack, you've got into a good berth, I hear. I suppose you look to succeed your uncle some day?" was reckoned a friendly familiarity rather than an offensive impertinence.

I learned that my parents had hoped that, as I was his nephew, Uncle Henry would take me as clerk without the usual premium. Indeed, when my uncle first urged my going to him, he had more than hinted that he should not expect a premium with his brother's son. But he was fond of his money (of which he had plenty), and when people are that, they are apt to begin to grudge, if there is time, between promise and performance. Uncle Henry had a whole year in which to think about foregoing two or three hundred pounds, and as it drew to a close, it seemed to worry him to such a degree, that he proposed to take me for half the usual premium instead of completely remitting it; and he said something about my being a stupid sort of boy, and of very little use to him for some time to come. He said it to justify himself for drawing back, I am quite sure, but it did me no good at home.

My father had plenty of honourable pride, and

he would hear of no compromise. He said that he should pay the full premium for me that Uncle Henry's other clerks had had to pay, and from this no revulsion of feeling on my uncle's part would move him. He was quite bland with Uncle Henry, and he was not quite bland towards me.

When I fairly grasped the situation (and I contrived to get a pretty clear account of it from my mother), there rushed upon me the conviction that a new phase had come over my prospects. When I put aside my own longings for my father's will; and every time that office-life seemed intolerable to me, and I was tempted to break my bonds, and thought better of it and settled down again, this thought had always remained behind: "I will try; and if the worst comes to the worst, and I really cannot settle down into a clerk, I can but run away then." But circumstances had altered my case. I felt that now I must make up my mind for good and all. My father would have to make some little sacrifices to find the money, and when it was once paid, I could not let it be in vain. Come what might, I must stick to the office then, and for life.

Some weeks passed whilst I was turning this over and over in my mind. I was constantly forgetting things in the office, but Moses Benson helped me out of every scrape. He was kinder and kinder, so that I often felt sorry that I could not feel fonder of him, and that his notions of fun and amusement only disgusted me instead of making us friends. They convinced me of one thing. My dear mother's chief dread about my going out of my own country was for the wicked ways I might learn in strange lands. A town with an unpronounceable name suggested foreign iniquities to her tender fears, but our own town, where she and everybody we knew bought everything we daily used, did not frighten her at all. I did not tell her, but I was quite convinced myself that I might get pretty deep into mischief in my idle hours, even if I lived within five miles of home, and had only my uncle's clerks for my comrades.

During these weeks Jem came home for the holidays. He was at a public school now, which many of our friends regarded as an extravagant folly on my father's part. We had a very happy time together, and this would have gone far to keep me at home, if it had not, at the same time, deepened my disgust with our town, and my companions in the office. In plain English, the training of two good schools, and the society of boys superior to himself, had made a gentleman of Jem, and the contrast between his looks and ways, and manners, and those of my uncle's clerks were not favourable to the latter. How proud my father was of him! With me he was in a most irritable

mood (and one grumble to which I heard him give utterance, that it was very inconvenient to have to pay this money just at the most expensive period of Jem's education), went heavily into the scale for running away. And that night, as it happened, Jem and I sat up late, and had a long and loving chat. He abused the office to my heart's content, and was very sympathetic when I told him that I had wished to go to sea, and how my father had refused to allow me.

"I think he made a great mistake," said Jem; and he told me of "a fellow's brother" that he knew about, who was in the Merchant Service, and how well he was doing. "It's not even as if Uncle Henry were coming out generously," he added.

Dear, dear! How pleasant it was to hear somebody else talk on my side of the question. And who was I that I should rebuke Jem for calling our worthy uncle a curmudgeon, and stigmatizing the Jew-clerk as a dirty beast? I really dared not tell him that Moses grew more familiar as my time to be articulated drew near; that he called me Jack Sprat, and his dearest friend, and offered to procure me the "silver-top" (or champagne)—which he said I must "stand" on the day I took my place at the fellow desk to his—of the first quality and at less than cost price; and that he had provided me gratis with a choice of "excuses" (they were unblushing lies) to give to our good mother for spending that evening in town, and "having a spree."

From my affairs we came to talk of Jem's, and I found that even he, poor chap! was not without his troubles. He confided to me, with many expressions of shame and vexation, that he had got into debt, but having brought home good reports and even a prize on this occasion, he hoped to persuade my father to pay what he owed.

"You see, Jack, he's awfully good to me, but he will do things his own way, and what's worse, the way they were done in his young days. You remember the row we had about his giving me an allowance? He didn't want to, because he never had one, only tips from his governor when the old gentleman was pleased with him. And he said it was quite enough to send me to such a good and expensive school, and I ought to think of that, and not want more because I had got much. We'd an awful row, for I thought it was so unfair his making out I was greedy and ungrateful, and I told him so, and I said I was quite game to go to a cheap school if he liked, only wherever I was I did want to be 'like the other fellows.' I begged him to take me away and to let me go somewhere cheap with you; and I said, if the fellows there had no allowances, we could do without. As I

told him, it's not the beastly things that you buy that you care about, only of course you don't like to be the only fellow who can't buy 'em. So then he came round, and said I should have an allowance, but I must do with a very small one. So I said, very well, then I mustn't go in for the games. Then he wouldn't have that; so then I made out a list of what the subscriptions are to cricket, and so on, and then your flannels and shoes, and it came to double what he offered me. He said it was simply disgraceful that boys shouldn't be able to be properly educated, and have an honest game at cricket for the huge price he paid, without the parents being fleeced for all sorts of extravagances at exorbitant prices. And I know well enough its disgraceful, what we have to pay for school books and for things of all sorts you have to get in the town; but, as I said to the governor, why don't you kick up a dust with the head master, or write to the papers—what's the good of rowing us? One must have what other fellows have, and get 'em where other fellows get 'em. But he never did—I wish he would. I should enjoy fighting old Pompous if I were in his place. But they're as civil as butter to each other, and then old Pompous goes on feathering his nest, and backing up the tradespeople, and the governor pitches into the young men of the present day."

"He did give you the bigger allowance, didn't he?" said I, at this pause in Jem's rhetoric.

"Yes, he did. He's awfully good to me. But you know, Jack, he never paid it quite all, and he never paid it quite in time. I found out from my mother he did it on purpose to make me value it more, and be more careful. Doesn't it seem odd he shouldn't see that I can't pay the subscriptions a few shillings short or a few days late? One must find the money somehow, and then one has to pay for that, and then you're short, and go on tick, and it runs up, and then they dun you, and you're cleaned out, and there you are!"

At which climax old Jem laid his curly head on his arms, and I began to think very seriously.

"How much do you owe?"

Jem couldn't say. He thought he could reckon up, so I got a pencil and made a list from his dictation, and from his memory, which was rather vague. When it was done (and there seemed to be a misty margin beyond), I was horrified. "Why, my dear fellow!" I exclaimed, "if you'd had your allowance ever so regularly, it wouldn't have covered this sort of thing."

"I know, I know," said poor Jem, clutching remorsefully at his curls. "I've been a regular fool! Jack! whatever you do—never tick. It's the very mischief. You never know what you owe, and so you feel vague and order more. And

you never know what you don't owe, which is worse, for sometimes you're in such despair, it would be quite a relief to catch some complaint and die. It's like going about with a stone round your neck, and nobody kind enough to drown you. I can't stand any more of it. I shall make a clean breast to Father, and if he can't set me straight, I won't go back; I'll work on the farm sooner, and let him pay my bills instead of my schooling—and serve old Pompous right."

Poor Jem! long after he had cheered up and gone to bed, I sat up and thought. When my premium was paid where was the money for Jem's debts to come from? And would my father be in the humour to pay them? If he did not, Jem would not go back to school. Of that I was quite certain. Jem had thought over his affairs, which was an effort for him, but he always thought in one direction. His thoughts never went backwards and forwards as mine did. If he had made up his mind, there was no more prospect of his changing it than if he had been my father. And if the happy terms between them were broken, and Jem's career checked when he was doing so well!—the scales that weighed my own future were becoming very uneven now.

I clasped my hands and thought. If I ran away, the money would be there for Jem's debts, and his errors would look pale in the light of my audacity, and he would be dearer than ever at home, whilst for me were freedom, independence (for I had not a doubt of earning bread and cheese, if only as a working man): perhaps a better understanding with my father when I had been able to prove my courage and industry, or even when he got the temperate and dutiful letter I meant to post to him when I was fairly off; and beyond all, the desire of my eyes, the sight of the world.

Should I stay now? And for what? To see old Jem at logger-heads with my father, and perhaps demoralised by an inferior school? To turn my own back and shut my eyes for ever on all that the wide seas embrace; my highest goal to be to grow as rich as Uncle Henry or richer, and perhaps as mean or meaner? Should I choose for life a life I hated, and set seals to my choice by drinking silver-top with the Jew-clerk?—No, Moses, no!

* * * * *

I got up soon after dawn and was in the garden at sunrise the morning that I ran away. I had made my plans carefully, and carried them out, so far with success.

Including the old miser's bequest which his lawyer had paid, there were thirteen pounds to my name in the town savings-bank, and this sum I

had drawn out to begin life with. I wrapped a five-pound note in a loving letter to Jem, and put both into the hymn-book on his shelf—I knew it would not be opened till Sunday. Very few run-aways have as much as eight pounds to make a start with: and as one could not be quite certain how my father would receive Jem's confession, I thought he might be glad to have a few pounds of his own, and I knew he had spent his share of the miser's money long ago.

I meant to walk to a station about seven miles distant, and there take train for Liverpool. I should be clumsy indeed, I thought, if I could not stow away on board some vessel, as hundreds of lads had done before me, and make myself sufficiently useful to pay my passage when I was found out.

When I got into the garden I kicked my foot against something in the grass. It was my mother's little gardening-fork. She had been tidying her pet perennial border, and my father had called her hastily, and she had left it half finished, and had forgotten the fork. A few minutes more or less were of no great importance to me, for it was very early, so I finished the border quite neatly, and took the fork indoors.

I put it in a corner of the hall where the light was growing stronger and making familiar objects clear. In a house like ours and amongst people like us, furniture was not chopped and changed and decorated as it is now. The place had looked like this ever since I could remember, and it would look like this to-morrow morning, though my eyes would not see it. I stood stupidly by the hall table where my father's gloves lay neatly one upon the other beside his hat. I took them up, almost mechanically, and separated them, and laid them together again finger to finger, and thumb to thumb, and held them with a stupid sort of feeling, as if I could never put them down and go away.

What would my father's face be like when he took them up this very morning to go out and look for me? and when—oh when!—should I see his face again?

I began to feel what one is apt to learn too late, that in childhood one takes the happiness of home for granted, and kicks against the pricks of its grievances, not having felt the far harder buffetings of the world. Moreover (which one does not think of then), that parental blunders and injustices are the mistakes and tyrannies of a special love that one may go many a mile on one's own wilful way and not meet a second time. Who—in the wide world—would care to be bothered with my confidence, and blame me for withholding it? Should I meet many people to whom it would matter if

we misunderstood each other? Would anybody hereafter love me well enough to be disappointed in me? Would other men care so much for my fate as to insist on guiding it by lines of their own ruling?

I pressed the gloves passionately against my eyes to keep in the tears. If my day-dreams had been the only question, I should have changed my mind now. If the home grievances had been all, I should have waited for time and patience to mend them. I could not have broken all these heart-strings. I should never have run away. But there was much more, and my convictions were not changed, though I felt as if I might have managed better as regards my father.

Would he forgive me? I hoped and believed so. Would my mother forgive me? I knew she would—as GOD forgives.

And with the thought of her, I knelt down, and put my head on the hall table and prayed for my soul—not for fair winds, and prosperous voyages, and good luck, and great adventures; but that it might please GOD to let me see Home again, and the faces that I loved, ah, so dearly, after all!

And then I got up, and crossed the threshold, and went out into the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed."
Old Proverb.

I HAVE often thought that the biggest bit of good luck (and I was lucky), which befell me on my outset into the world, was that the man I sat next to in the railway carriage was not a rogue. I travelled third class to Liverpool for more than one reason—it was the cheapest way, besides which I did not wish to meet any family friends—and the man I speak of was a third-class passenger, and he went to Liverpool too.

At the time I was puzzled to think how he came to guess that I was running away, that I had money with me, and that I had never been to Liverpool before; but I can well imagine now how my ignorance and anxiety must have betrayed themselves at every station I mistook for the end of my journey, and with every question which I put, as I flattered myself, in the careless tones of common conversation. I really wonder I had not thought beforehand about my clothes, which fitted very badly on the character I assumed, and the company I chose; but it was not perhaps to be ex-

pected that I should know then, as I know now, how conspicuous all over me must have been the absence of those outward signs of hardship and poverty, which they who know poverty and hardship know so well.

I wish I had known them, because then I should have given the man some of my money when we parted, instead of feeling too delicate to do so. I can remember his face too well not to know now how much he must have needed it, and how heroic a virtue honesty must have been in him.

It did not seem to strike him as at all strange or unnatural that a lad of my age should be seeking his own fortune, but I feel sure that he thought it was misconduct on my part which had made me run away from home. I had no grievance to describe which he could recognize as grievous enough to drive me out into the world. However, I felt very glad that he saw no impossibility in my earning my own livelihood, or even anything very unusual in my situation.

"I suppose lots of young fellows run away from home and go to sea from a place like this?" said I, when we had reached Liverpool.

"And there's plenty more goes that has no homes to run from," replied he sententially.

Prefacing each fresh counsel with the formula, "You'll excuse me," he gave me some excellent advice as we threaded the greasy streets, and jostled the disreputable-looking population of the lower part of the town. General counsels as to my conduct, and the desirableness of turning over a new leaf for "young chaps" who had been wild and got into scrapes at home. And particular counsels which were invaluable to me, as to changing my dress, how to hide my money, what to turn my hand to with the quickest chance of bread-winning in strange places, and how to keep my own affairs to myself among strange people.

It was in the grasiest street, and among the most disreputable-looking people, that we found the "slop-shop" where, by my friend's orders, I was to "rig out" in clothes befitting my new line of life. He went in first, so he did not see the qualm that seized me on the doorstep. A revulsion so violent that it nearly made me sick then and there; and if someone had seized me by the nape of my neck, and landed me straightway at my desk in Uncle Henry's office, would, I believe, have left me tamed for life. For if this unutterable wiliness of sights and sounds and smells which hung around the dark entry of the slop shop were indeed the world, I felt a sudden and most vehement conviction that I would willingly renounce the world for ever. As it happened, I had not at that moment the choice. My friend had gone in, and I dared not stay among the people outside. I

groped my way into the shop, which was so dark as well as dingy that they had lighted a small oil-lamp just above the head of the man who served out the slops. Even so the light that fell on him was dim and fitful, and was the means of giving me another start in which I gasped out—"Moses Benson!"

The man turned and smiled (he had the Jew-clerk's exact smile), and said softly:

"Cohen, my dear, not Benson."

And as he bent at another angle of the oil-lamp I saw that he was older than the clerk, and dirtier; and though his coat was quite curiously like the one I had so often cleaned, he had evidently either never met with the invaluable "scouring drops," or did not feel it worth while to make use of them in such a dingy hole.

One shock helped to cure the other. Come what might, I could not sneak back now to the civil congratulations of that other Moses, and the scorn of his eye. But I was so nervous that my fellow-traveller transacted my business for me, and when the oil-lamp flared and I caught Moses Cohen looking at me, I jumped as if Snuffy had come behind me. And when we got out (and it was no easy matter to escape from the various benevolent offers of the owner of the slop-shop), my friend said:

"You'll excuse me telling you, but whatever you do don't go near that other Jew again. He's no friend for a young chap like you."

"I should have got your slops cheaper," he added, "if I could have taken your clothes in without you."

My "slops" were a very loose suit of clothes made of much coarser material than my own, and I suppose they were called "slops" because they fitted in such a peculiarly sloppy manner. The whole "rig out" (it included a strong clasp-knife, and a little leathern bag to keep my money in, which I was instructed to carry round my neck) was provided by Mr. Cohen in exchange for the clothes I had been wearing before, with the addition of ten shillings in cash. I dipped again into the leathern bag to provide a meal for myself and my friend; then, by his advice, I put a shilling and some coppers into my pocket, that I might not have to bring out my purse in public, and with a few parting words of counsel he wrung my hand, and we parted—he towards some place of business where he hoped to get employment, and I in the direction of the docks, where the ships come and go.

"I hope you *will* get work," were my last words.

"The same to you, my lad," was his reply, and it seemed to acknowledge me as one of that big brotherhood of toilers who, when they want

"something to do," want it not to pass time but to earn daily bread.

CHAPTER XV.

"Deark d'on Dearka." (*"Big of a Beggar."*)
Irish Proverb.

"... From her way of speaking they also saw immediately that she too was an Eirisher . . . They must be a bonny family when they are all at home!"—*The Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor in Dalkeith.*

"DOCK" (so ran the 536th of the "Penny Numbers") is "a place artificially formed for the reception of ships, the entrance of which is generally closed by gates. There are two kinds of docks, dry-docks and wet-docks. The former are used for receiving ships in order to their being inspected and repaired. For this purpose the dock must be so contrived that the water may be admitted or excluded at pleasure, so that a vessel can be floated in when the tide is high, and that the water may run out with the fall of the tide, or be pumped out, the closing of the gates preventing its return. Wet-docks are formed for the purpose of keeping vessels always afloat. . . . One of the chief uses of a dock is to keep a uniform level of water, so that the business of loading and unloading ships can be carried on without any interruption. . . . The first wet-dock for commercial purposes made in this kingdom was formed in the year 1708 at Liverpool, then a place of no importance."

The business of loading and unloading ships can be carried on without any interruption. If everything that the "Penny Numbers" told of were as true to the life as that, the world's wonders (at least those of them which begin with the first four letters of the alphabet) must be all that I had hoped; and perhaps that bee-hive about which Master Isaac and I had had our jokes, did really yield a "considerable income" to the fortunate French bee-master!

Loading and unloading, coming and going, lifting and lowering, shouting and replying, swearing and retorting, creaking and jangling, shrieking and bumping, cursing and chaffing, the noise and restlessness of men and things were utterly bewildering. I had often heard of a Babel of sounds, but I had never before heard anything so like what one might fancy it must have been when that great crowd of workmen broke up, and left building their tower, in a confounding of language and misunderstanding of speech. For the men who went to and fro in these docks, each his own way, jostling and yelling to each other, were men of all

nations, and the confusion was of tongues as well as of work. At one minute I found myself standing next to a live Chinaman in a pigtail, who was staring as hard as I at some swarthy-supple-bodied sailors with eager faces, and scant clothing wrapped tightly round them, chatting to each other in a language as strange to the Chinaman as to me, their large lustrous eyes returning our curiosity with interest, and contrasting strangely with the tea-caddy countenance of my elbow neighbour. Then a turbaned Turk went by, and then two grinning negroes, and there were lots of men who looked more like Englishmen, but who spoked with other tongues, and amongst those who loaded and unloaded in this busy place, which was once of no importance, Irish brogue seemed the commonest language of all.

One thing made me hopeful—there were plenty of boys no bigger than myself who were busy working, and therefore earning wages, and as I saw several lads who were dressed in suits the very counterpart of my own, I felt sure that my travelling companion had done me a good turn when he rigged me out in slops. An incident that occurred in the afternoon made me a little more doubtful about this.

I really had found much to counterbalance the anxieties of my position in the delightful novelty and variety of life around me, and not a little to raise my hopes; for I had watched keenly for several hours as much as I could see from the wharf of what was going on in this ship and that, and I began to feel less confused. I perceived plainly that a great deal of every-day sort of work went on in ships as well as in houses, with the chief difference, in dock at any rate, of being done in public. In the most free and easy fashion, to the untiring entertainment of crowds of idlers besides myself, the men and boys on vessel after vessel lying alongside, washed out their shirts and socks, and hung them up to dry, cooked their food, cleaned out their pots and pans, tidied their holes and corners, swept and brushed, and fetched and carried, and did scores of things which I knew I could do perfectly, for want of something better to do.

"It's clear there's plenty of dirty work to go on with till one learns seamanship," I thought, and the thought was an honest satisfaction to me.

I had always swept Uncle Henry's office, and that had been light work after cleaning the school-room at Snuffy's. My hands were never likely to be more chapped at sea than they had been with dirt and snow and want of things to dry oneself with at school; and as to coal-carrying—

Talking of coals, on board the big ship, out of which great white bales, strapped with bars of

iron, were being pulled up by machinery, and caught and flung about by the "unloaders," there was a man whose business it seemed to be to look after the fires, and who seemed also to have taken a roll in the coal-hole for pleasure; and I saw him find a tin basin and a square of soap, and a decent rough towel to wash his face and hands, such as would have been reckoned luxurious in a dormitory at Snuffy's. Altogether, when a heavy hand was laid suddenly on my shoulder, and a gruff voice said:

"Well, my young star-gazing greenhorn, and what do you want?"

I replied with alacrity, as well as with more respect than the stranger's appearance was calculated to inspire, "Please, sir, I want to go to sea, and I should like to ship for America."

He was not a nice-looking man by any means—far too suggestive of Snuffy, when Snuffy was partly drunk. But after a pause, he said:

"All right. Where are your papers? What was your ship, and why did ye run?"

"I have not served in a ship yet, sir," said I, "but I'm sure——"

He did not allow me to go on. With a sudden fierce look that made him more horribly like Snuffy than before, he caught me by my sleeve and a bit of my arm, and shoved me back from the edge of the dock till we stood alone. "Then where did ye steal your slops?" he hissed at me with oaths. "Look here, ye young gallows-bird, if ye don't stand me a liquor, I'll run ye in as a run-away apprentice. So cash up, and look sharp."

I was startled, but I was not quite such a fool as I looked, mind or body. I had once had a hardish struggle with Snuffy himself when he was savage, and I was strong and agile beyond my seeming. I dived deeply into my trousers-pocket, as if feeling for the price of a "liquor," and the man having involuntarily allowed me little swing for this, I suddenly put up my shoulders, and ran at him as if my head were a battering-ram, and his moleskin waistcoat the wall of a beleaguered city, and then wrenching myself from his grasp, and dodging the leg he had put out to trip me, I fled blindly down the quay.

No one can take orange-peel into account, however. I slipped on a large piece and came head-long, with the aggravation of hearing my enemy breathing hoarsely close above me. As regards him, I suppose it was lucky that my fall jerked the shilling and the penny out of my pocket, for as the shilling rolled away he went after it, and I saw him no more. What I did see when I sat up was the last of my penny (which had rolled in another direction), as it gave one final turn and fell into the dock.

I could have cried with vexation, and partly with fatigue, for it was getting late, and I was getting tired. I had fallen soft enough, as it happened, for I found myself on a heap of seeds, some kind of small bean, and the yielding mass made a pleasant resting-place. There was no one very near, and I moved round to the back of the heap to be still more out of sight, and sat down to try and think what it was best to do. If my slops were really a sort of uniform to which I was not entitled, they would do me more harm than good. But whom could I ask? If there were an honest, friendly soul in all this crowd, and I could come across him, I felt that (without telling too much of my affairs) I could explain that I had exchanged some good shore clothes of my own for what I had been told were more suitable to the work I was looking out for, and say further that though I had never yet been at sea, I was hardy, and willing to make myself useful in any way. But how could I tell whom to trust? I might speak fair to some likely-looking man, and he might take me somewhere and strip me of my slops, and find my leather money-bag, and steal that too. When I thought how easily my fellow-traveller might have treated me thus, I felt a thrill of gratitude towards him, and then I wondered how he had prospered in his search for work. As for me, it was pretty clear that if I hoped to work my way in this wicked world, I must suspect a scoundrel in every man I met, and forestall mischief by suspicion. As I sat and thought, I sifted the beans through my fingers, and saw that there were lots of strange seeds mixed with them, some of very fantastic shapes; and I wondered what countries they came from, and with what shape and scent and colour the plants blossomed, and thought how Charlie would like some of them to sow in pots and watch. As I drove my hands deeper into the heap, I felt that it was quite warm inside, and then I put my head down to smell if there was any fragrance in the seeds, and I did not lift it up again, for I fell fast asleep.

I was awakened by a touch on my head, and a voice just above me, saying: "He's alive anyhow, thank GOD!" and sitting up among the beans I found that it was dark and foggy, but a lamp at some distance gave me a pretty good view of an old woman who was bending over me.

She was dressed, apparently, in several skirts of unequal lengths, each one dingier and more useless-looking than the one beneath it. She had a man's coat, with a short pipe in the breast-pocket; and what her bonnet was like one could not tell, for it was comfortably tied down by a crimson handkerchief with big white spots, which covered it completely. Her face was as crumpled and as dirty

as her clothes, but she had as fine eyes and as kind eyes as mine had ever met. And every idea of needful wariness and of the wickedness of the world went quite naturally out of my head, and I said, "Did you think I was dead, mother?"

"I did not; though how would I know what would be the matter wid ye, lying there those three hours on your face, and not a stir out o' ye?"

"You're very kind," I said, dusting the beandust off my trousers, and I suppose I looked a little puzzled, for the old woman (helping me by flicking at my sleeve) went on: "I'll not deceive ye, my dear. It was my own Micky that was on my mind; though now you've lifted your face, barring the colour of his hair, there's no likeness betwixt ye, and I'm the disappointed woman again, God help me!"

"Is Micky your son?" I asked.

"He is, and a better child woman never had, till he tired of everything I would do for him, being always the boy for a change, and went for a stow-away from this very port."

"Sit down, mother; stow-aways are lads that hide on board ship, and get taken to sea for nothing, aren't they?"

"They are, darlin'; but it's not for nothing they get kept at sea, ye may take your oath. And many's the one that leaves this in the highest of expectations, and is glad enough to get back to it in a tattered shirt and a whole skin, and with an increase of contentment under the ways of home upon his mind."

"And you hope Micky'll come back, I suppose?"

"Why wouldn't I, acushla? Sure it was by reason o' that I got bothered with the washin' after me poor boy left me, from my mind being continually in the docks, instead of with the clothes. And there I would be at the end of the week, with the captain's jerseys gone to old Miss Harding, and *his* washing no corrier than *hers*, though he'd more good nature in him over the accidents, and iron-moulds on the table-cloths, and pocket-handkerchers missin', and me ruined entirely with making them good, and no thanks for it, till a good-natured sowl of a foreigner that kept a pie-shop larned me to make the coffee, and lint me the money to buy a barra, and he says: 'Go as convanient to the ships as ye can, mother; it'll aise your mind. My own heart,' says he, laying his hand to it, 'knows what it is to have my body here, and the whole sowl of me far away.'

"Did you pay him back?" I asked. I spoke without thinking, and still less did I mean to be rude; but it suddenly struck me that I was young and hearty, and that it would be almost a duty to share the contents of my leather bag with this



"I was wakened by a touch on my head, and a voice just above me." P. 58.

poor old woman, if there were no chance of her being unable to repay the generous foreigner.

"Did I pay him back?" she screamed. "Would I be the black-hearted thief to him that was kind

to me? Sorra bit nor sup but dry bread and water passed me lips till he had his own agin, and the heart's blessings of owld Biddy Macartney along with it."

I made my peace with old Biddy as well as I could, and turned the conversation back to her son.

"So you live in the docks with your coffee-barrow, mother, that you may be sure not to miss Micky when he comes ashore?"

"I do, darlin'. Fourteen years all but three days. He'll be gone fifteen if we all live till Wednesday week."

"Fifteen? But, mother, if he were like me when he went, he can't be very like me now. He must be a middle-aged man. Do you think you'd know him?"

This question was more unfortunate than the other, and produced such howling and weeping, and beating of Biddy's knees as she rocked herself among the beans, that I should have thought every soul in the docks would have crowded round us. But no one took any notice of us, and by degrees I calmed her, chiefly by the assertion—"He'll know you, mother, anyhow."

"He will so, GOD bless him!" said she. "And haven't I gone over it all in me own mind, often and often, when I'd see the vessels feelin' their way home through the darkness, and the coffee staymin enough to cheer your heart wid the smell of it, and the laste taste in life of something better in the stone bottle under me petticoats. And then the big ship would be coming in with her lights at the head of her, and myself sitting alone with me patience, GOD helping me, and one and another strange face going by. And then he comes along, cold maybe, and smells the coffee. 'Bedad, but that's a fine smell with it,' says he, for Micky was mighty particular in his aitin' and drinkin'. 'I'll take a dhrop of that,' says he, not noticing me particular, and if ever I'd the saycret of a good cup he gets it, me consayling me face. 'What will it be?' says he, setting down the mug. 'What would it be, Micky, from your Mother?' says I, and I lifts me head. Arrah, but then there's the heart's delight between us. 'Mother!' says he. 'Micky!' says I. And he lifts his foot and kicks over the barra, and dances me round in his arms. 'Ochone!' says the spictators; 'there's the fine coffee that's running into the dock.' 'Let it run,' says I, in the joy of me heart, 'and you after it, and the barra on the top of ye, now Micky me son's come home!'"

"Wonderfully jolly!" said I. "And it must be pleasant even to think of it."

But Biddy's effort of imagination seemed to have exhausted her, and she relapsed into the lowest possible spirits, from which she suddenly roused herself to return to her neglected coffee-stall.

"Bad manners to me, for an old fool! sitting

here whineging and lamenting, when there's folks, maybe, waiting for their coffee, and yourself would have been the better of some this half-hour. Come along wid ye."

And giving a tighter knot to the red kerchief, which had been disordered by her lamentations, the old woman went down the dock, I following her.

We had not to go far. Biddy's coffee barrow was placed just as the pieman had advised. It was as near the ships as possible. In fact it was actually under the shadow of a big black-looking vessel which loomed large through the fog, and to and from which men were coming and going as usual. With several of these the old woman interchanged some good-humoured chaff as she settled herself in her place, and bade me sit beside her.

"Tuck your legs under ye, agra! on that bit of an odd sack. 'Tis what I wrap round me shoulders when the nights do be wet, as it isn't this evening, thank GOD! And there's the coffee for ye."

"Mother," said I, "do you think you could sit so as to hide me for a few minutes? All the money I have is in a bag round my neck, and I don't want strangers to see it."

"Ye'll just keep it there, then," replied Biddy, irately, "and don't go an' insult me wid the show of it."

And she turned her back on me, whilst I drank my coffee, and ate some excellent cakes, which formed part of her stock-in-trade. One of these she insisted on my putting into my pocket "against the hungry hour." I thanked her warmly for the gift, whereupon she became mollified, and said I was kindly welcome; and whilst she was serving some customers, I turned round and looked at the ship. Late as it was, people seemed very busy about her, rather more so than about any I had seen. As I sat, I was just opposite to a yawning hole in the ship's side, into which men were noisily running great bales and boxes, which other men on board were lowering into the depths of the vessel with very noisy machinery and with much shouting in a sort of uncouth rhythm, to which the grating and bumping of the crane and its chains was a trifle. I was so absorbed by looking, and it was so impossible to hear anything else unless one were attending, that I never discovered that Biddy and I were alone again, till the touch of her hand on my head made me jump.

"I beg your pardon, mother," I said; "I couldn't think what it was."

"I ax yours, dear. It's just the curls, and I'm the foolish woman to look at 'em. Barrin' the hair, ye don't favour each other the laste."

I had really heard a good deal about Micky, and

was getting tired of him, and inclined to revert to my own affairs.

"Mother, do you know where this ship comes from?"

"I do not. But she sails with the morning for Halifax, I'm told. And that's America way, and I insensed the cook—that was him that axed me where I bought my coffee—to have an eye out for Micky, in case he might come across him anywhere."

America way! To-morrow morning! A storm of thoughts rushed through my head, and in my passionate longing for help I knelt up by the old Irishwoman and laid my hand upon hers.

"Mother dear, do help me! You are so kind, and you've a boy of your own at sea. I want to go to America, and I've no papers or anything. Couldn't I stow away as Micky did? Couldn't I stow away on this one? I can work well enough when they find me out, if I could only hide so as to get off; and you know the ships and the docks so well, you could tell me how, if only you would."

I am always ashamed to remember the feeble way in which I finished off by breaking down, though I do not know that I could have used any argument that would have gone so far with Biddy. If it had been a man who had been befriending me, I'm sure I shouldn't have played the fool, but it was a woman, so I felt doubly helpless in having to depend on her, and she felt doubly kind, and in short, I put my face in my hands and sobbed.

For quite four hours after this I was puzzled to death by smelling stale bad tobacco about myself; then I discovered that by some extraordinary jerk in the vehemence of the embrace which was Biddy's first response to my appeal, the little black pipe had got out of her coat-pocket and tumbled down the breast of my slops.

I hope my breakdown was partly due to the infectious nature of emotion, of which Biddy was so lavish that my prospects were discussed in a sadly unbusinesslike fashion. My conscience is really quite clear of having led her to hope that I would look out for Micky on the other side of the Atlantic, but I fear that she had made up her mind that we should meet, and that this went far towards converting her to my views for stowing away on the vessel lying alongside of us. However, that important point once reached, the old woman threw herself into the enterprise with a practical knowledge of the realities of the undertaking and a zest for the romance of it which were alike invaluable to me.

"The botheration of it is," said Biddy, after some talk, tangling her bonnet and handkerchief over her face till I felt inclined to beg her to let

me put her straight—"the botheration of it is, that it's near to closing-time, and when the bell rings every soul'll be cleared out, labourers and idlers, and myself among 'em. Ye'll have to hide, me darlin' but there'll be no mighty difficulty in that, for I see a fine bit of tarpaulin yonder that'd consale a dozen of the likes of you. But there's that fool of a watchman that'll come parading and meandering up and down wid all the airs of a sentry on him and none of his good looks, and wid a sneaking bull's-eye of a lantern in his hand. He's at the end of the wharf now, purshuin' to him! Maybe I'll get him to taste a dhrop of me coffee before the bell rings. Many's the cup I gave to the old watchman before him, peace to his sowl, the kindly craythur! that never did a more ill-natured thing on his beat than sleep like a child. Hide now, darlin', and keep the tail of your eye at a corner where ye'll see the ship. Maybe he'll take a nap yet, for all his airs, and then there's the chance for ye! And mind now, keep snug till the pilot's gone as I warned ye, and then it's the bold heart and the civil tongue, and just the good-nature of your ways, that'll be your best friends. The cook tells me the captain's as decent a man as iver he served with, so you might aisy do worse, and are not likely to do better. Are ye hid now? Whisht! Whisht!"

I heard most of this through a lifted corner of the tarpaulin, under which I had the good luck to secrete myself without observation and without difficulty. In the same manner I became witness to the admirable air of indifference with which Biddy was mixing herself a cup of coffee as the watchman approached. I say *mixing* advisedly, for as he came up she was conspicuously pouring some of the contents of the stone bottle into her cup. Whether this drew the watchman's attention in an unusual degree, of course I do not know, but he stopped to say, "Good evening, Biddy."

"Good evening to ye, me dear, and a nasty damp evening it is.

"You're taking something to keep the damp out, I see, missus."

"I am, dear; but it's not for a foine milithary-looking man like yourself to be having the laugh at a poor old craythur with nothin' but the wind and weather in her bones."

"The wind and weather get into my bones, I can tell you," said the watchman; "and I begin my work in the fog just when you're getting out of it."

"And that's thrue, worse luck. Take a dhrop of coffee, alanna, before I lave ye."

"No, thank ye, missus; I've just had my supper."

"And would that privint ye from takin' the cup

I'd be offering ye, wid a taste of somethin' in it aginst the damps, barrin' the bottle be empty?"

"Well, I'm not particular—as you are so pressing. Thank ye, mum; here's your good health."

I heard the watchman say this, though at the moment I dared not peep, and then I heard him cough.

"My sakes, Biddy, you make your—coffee—strong."

"Strong, darlin'? It's pure, ye mane. It's the rale craythur, that, and bedad! there's a a dhrop or two left that's not worth the removing, and we'll share it annyhow. Here's to them that's far—r away."

"Thank you, thank you, woman."

"Thim that's *near*, and thim that's far away!" said Biddy, improving upon her toast.

There was a pause. I could hear the old woman packing up her traps, and then the man (upon whom the coffee and whisky seemed to produce a roughening rather than a soothing effect) said coarsely, "You're a rum lot, you Irish!"

"We are, dear," replied Biddy, blandly; "and that's why we'd be comin' all the way to Lancashire for the improvement of our manners." And she threw the sacking round her neck, and lifted the handles of her barrow.

"Good-night, me darlin'!" said she, raising her voice as she moved off. "*We'll meet again*, God willing."

"Safe enough, unless you tumble into the dock," replied the watchman. "Go steady, missus. I hope you'll get safe home with that barra o' yours."

"God send all safe home that's far from it!" shouted Biddy, in tones that rose above the rumbling of the wheel and the shuffling of her shoes.

"Haw! haw!" laughed the watchman, and with increased brutality in his voice he reiterated, "You're a rum lot, Biddy! and free of most things, blessings and all."

I was not surprised that the sound of the wheel and the shoes ceased suddenly. Biddy had set down her barrow to retort. But it was with deep gratitude that I found her postpone her own wrath to my safety, and content herself with making her enemy "a prisint of the contimpt of a rogue."

"And what would I be doing but blessing ye?" she cried, in a voice of such dramatic variety as only quick wits and warm feelings can give, it was so full at once of suppressed rage, humorous triumph, contemptuous irony, and infinite tenderness. And I need hardly say that it was raised to a ringing pitch that would have reached my ears had they been buried under twenty tarpaulins. "God bless ye for ivermore! Good luck to ye!

fine weather to ye! health and strength to ye! May the knaves that would harm ye be made fools for your benefit, and may niver worse luck light on one hair of your head than the best blessings of Biddy Macartney!"

Something peculiar in the sound of Biddy's retreating movements made me risk another glance from an angle of the tarpaulin.

And upon my honour it is strictly true that I saw the old Irish woman drive her barrow down the dock till she passed out of sight, and that she went neither walking nor running, but *dancing*; and a good high stepping dance too, that showed her stockings, and shook the handkerchief on her head. And when she reached the end of the wharf she snapped her fingers in the air.

Then I drew my head back, and I could hear the watchman guffaw as if he would have split his sides. And even after he began to tramp up and down I could hear him still chuckling as he paced by.

And if I did not hear Biddy chuckle, it was perhaps because the joke on her side lay deeper down.

CHAPTER XVI.

"The mariners shout,
The ships swing about,
The yards are all hoisted,
The sails flutter out."

The Saga of King Olaf.

THE docks were very quiet now. Only a few footfalls broke the silence, and the water sobbed a little round the piles, and there was some creaking and groaning and grinding, and the vessels drifted at their moorings, and bumped against the wharves.

The watchman paced up and down, and up and down. I did not hear him very clearly from under the tarpaulin, and sometimes when he went farther away I did not hear him at all. At last I was so long without hearing him that I peeped cautiously out. What Biddy had said might be, seemed really to have happened. The watchman was sitting in a sort of armchair of wonbound cotton-bales; his long coat was tucked between his legs, his hat was over his nose, and he was fast asleep.

I did not need any one to tell me that now was my time; but it was with limbs that almost refused their office from sheer fright, that I crept past the sleeping man, and reached the edge of the wharf. There was the vessel moving very slightly, and groaning dismally as she moved, and there was

the hole, and it was temptingly dark. But—the gangway that had been laid across from the wharf was gone! I could have jumped the chasm easily with a run, but I dared not take a run. If I did it all it must be done standing. I tried to fetch a breath free from heart-throbs, but in vain; so I set my teeth, and pulled nerves and sinews together and jumped.

It was too much for me, and I jumped short and fell. Then my training under the half-caste told in my favour. I caught the edge of the hole with my hands, and swung suspended over the water, with quite presence of mind enough to hear and think of what was going on about me. What I heard was the watchman, who roused up to call out, "Who's there?" and then he shot a sharp ray of light from his lantern right into the hole. It was very lucky for me that I was so low, for the light went over my head, and he saw nothing of me, my dark clothes making no mark against the ship's black hull.

My head was cool enough now, and my heart steady, and I listened with an intensity that postponed fear, though my predicament was not a pleasant one, and the rippling water below me was confusing.

The suspense was no doubt shorter than it seemed, before the light disappeared, and with a thankful heart I distinctly heard the watchman flop down again among the cotton-bales. Then I drew myself up over the edge and crept noiselessly into the ship. I took care to creep beyond reach of the lantern, and then the swaying of the vessel made me feel so giddy that I had to lie still for a while where I was, before I could recover myself enough to feel about for a suitable hiding-place.

As I afterwards learnt, I was on the lower deck, which was being used for cargo instead of passengers. The said cargo seemed so tightly packed, that in spite of creeping, and groping, and knocking myself pretty hard, I could feel no nook or corner to my mind. Then I turned giddy again and reeled against the door of a cabin, which gave way so far as to let me fall inwards on to a heap of old sails, ropes, and other softish ship lumber stowed away within. As I fell my hand struck something warm, which I fancied gave a writhe out of my grasp. I groped and seized it again, and now there was no mistake. It was somebody's arm, who said in a quick undertone, "Gently, gently, sirs; I'm coming along with ye. I'll gie ye my word I'm after no harm."

I was taken aback, but thought it well to keep up my position, which appeared to be one of advantage. The young man (for it was a youngster's voice) was evidently no ship's officer. If he were a dockyard pilferer, it was a nuisance, and a

complication in my affairs, but I might pull through the difficulty with presence of mind.

"Speak low!" I whispered sharply. "What's your name, and where do you come from?"

"Alister Auchterlay, they call me" (the whisper was a reluctant one, but I jogged his arm rather fiercely to shake the truth out of him). "I come from Aberdeenshire. But, man! if ye're for having me up in court, for God's sake let me plead in another name, for my mother taks the papers."

"What are you doing here?" I whispered in a not very steady whisper, as I think my prisoner detected.

"I'm just stowing away," he said eagerly; "I'm no harming a thing. Eh, sir, if you're a ship's prentice, or whatever may be your duties on this vessel, let me bide! There's scores of stowaways taken every day, and I'll work as few could."

"Do, do try and speak low," I whispered; "or we shall both be found out. *I'm stowing away myself!*"

"Whew, laddie! How long will ye have been in Liverpool?"

"Only to-day. How long have you been here?"

"A week, and a sore week too."

"You've no friends here, have you?"

"Freens, did ye say? I've no freens nearer than Scotland."

"You must have had a hard time of it," whispered.

"Ye may say so. I've slept four nights in the docks, and never managed to stow till to-night. There's a watchman about."

"I know," said I.

"I shouldn't have got in to-night, but the misconducted body's asleep, though I'll say it's the first time I saw him sleeping these four days. Eh, sirs! there's an awful indifference to responsibility, when a man does a thing like yon. But it'll be whisky, I'm thinking; for I heard him at clish-maclavers with one of these randy, drucken old Eirishers."

My blood boiled. "She was *not* drunk!" said I. And she's—she's a great friend of mine."

"Whisht! whisht, man! We'll be heard. I ask your pardon, I'm sure."

I made no reply. The Scotchman's tone was unpleasantly dry. Besides it was very difficult to give vent to one's just indignation in whispers, and I still felt giddy, though I was resting my back against some of the lumber, rather comfortably.

"You'll no be Eirish, yourself?" the Scotchman asked in his own accent, which was as strong in its way as Biddy's.

"I'm English," I said.

"Just so. And edyucated, I dare to say?"

"I suppose so."

"Ye've not forgiven me that I wronged the old lady? Indeed, but I ask your pardon, and hers no less. It's not for the best of us to sit in judgment on the erring, as my mother has often said to me, unless it comes in the plain path of duty. But maybe your own temper would be a bit soored if your head was as light and your heart as sick as mine with starvation and hope deferred——"

"Are you hungry?" I interrupted.

"I'll not be sorry when we get a meal."

"What have you had to-day?" I asked.

"I've been in the dock all day," he answered evasively, "but I'm no great eater at the best of times, and I chewed two bits of orange-peel, not to speak of a handful of corn where there was a big heap had been spilt by some wasteful body or another, that had small thoughts of it's coming to use. Now hoo in this world's a man to make honest profit on a commodity he entrusts——"

"Sh! sh! You're raising your voice again, said I. "Where's your hand? It's only a cake, but it'll be better than nothing." And I held out the cake Biddy had made me put in my pocket.

"I'll not take it from ye. Keep it for your own needs; I'm harder than yourself, it's likely," he said, pushing my hand aside, and added almost peevishly, "but keep the smell of it from me."

"I can spare it perfectly," I whispered. "I've had plenty to eat quite lately."

I shall never forget how he clutched it then. I could hear his teeth clash with the eagerness of his eating. It almost frightened me in the darkness.

"Eh! man, that was good!" he gasped. Are ye sure indeed and in truth ye could spare it all? I didn't think they made such bannocks out of Scotland. But we've much to learn in all matters, doubtless. Thank ye a thousand times."

"The old Irishwoman gave it me!" I said with some malice. "She made me put it in my pocket, though she had given me a good meal before, for which she would take nothing."

"It was leebereal of her," said Alister Auchterlay. "Verra leebereal; but there are good Christians to be met with, amongst all sorts, there's not a doot about it."

I should probably have pursued my defence of Biddy against this grudging—not to say insulting—tribute to her charity, if I had not begun to feel too tired to talk, and very much teased by the heaving of the vessel.

"I wish the ship would be quiet till we start," I said. "We're not at sea yet."

In reply to this Alister at some length, and with as much emphasis as whispering permitted, ex-

plained to me that a ship could not, in the nature of things, keep still, except in certain circumstances, such as being in dry dock for repairs or lying at anchor in absolutely still water.

"Good gracious!" I interrupted. "Of course I know all that. You don't suppose I expect it not to move."

"I understood ye to say that ye wished it," he replied with dignity, if not offence.

"I don't know what I wish!" I moaned.

My companion's reply to this was to feel about for me and then to begin scrambling over me; then he said—"Move on, laddie, to your right, and ye'll find space to lie on the flat of your back, close by the ship's side. I'm feared ye're barely fit for the job ye've undertaken, but ye'll be easier if ye lie down, and get some sleep."

I moved as he told me, and the relief of lying flat was great—so great that I began to pull myself together again, and made ready in my mind to thank my unseen companion for the generosity with which he had evidently given me the place he had picked for himself. But whilst I was thinking about it I fell fast asleep.

When I woke, for the first minute I thought I was at home, and I could not conceive what Martha could be doing, that there should be, as far as one could hear, chimney-sweeping, cinder-riddling, furniture-moving, clock-winding, and spring-cleaning, of the most awful nature, all going on at once, and in a storm of yelling and scolding, which was no part of our domestic ways. But in another minute I knew where I was, and by the light coming through a little round porthole above me, I could see my companion.

He was still sleeping, so that I could satisfy my keen curiosity, without rudeness. He had indeed given up the only bit of space to me, and was himself doubled up among lumber in a fashion that must have been very trying to the length of his limbs. For he was taller than I, though not, I thought, much older; two years or so, perhaps. The cut of his clothes (not their raggedness, though they were ragged as well as patched) confirmed me in my conviction that he was "not exactly a gentleman"; but I felt a little puzzled about him, for, broad as his accent was, he was even less exactly of the Tim Binder and Bob Furniss class.

He was not good-looking, and yet I hardly know any word that would so fittingly describe his face in the repose of sleep, and with that bit of light concentrated upon it, as the word "noble." It was drawn and pinched with pain and the endurance of pain, and I never saw anything so thin, except his hands, which lay close to his sides—both clenched. But I do think he would have been handsome if his face had not been almost

aggressively intelligent when awake, and if his eyebrows and eyelashes had had any colour. His hair was fair but not bright, and it was straight without being smooth, and tossed into locks that had no grace or curl. And why he made me think of a Bible picture—Jacob lying at the foot of the ladder to heaven, or something of that sort—I could not tell, and did not puzzle myself to wonder, for the ship was moving, and there was a great deal to be seen out of the window, tiny as it was.

It looked on to the dock, where men were running about in the old bewildering fashion. To-day it was not so bewildering to me, because I could see that the men were working with some purpose that affected our vessel, though the directions in which they ran, dragging ropes as thick as my leg, to the grinding of equally monstrous chains, were as mysterious as the figures of some dance one does not know. As to the noises they made, men and boys anywhere are given to help on their work with sounds of some sort, but I could not have believed in anything approaching to these, out of a lunatic asylum, unless I had heard them.

I could hear quite well, I could hear what was said, and a great deal of it, I am sorry to say, would have been better unsaid. But the orders which rang out interested me, for I tried to fit them on to what followed, though without much result. At last the dock seemed to be moving away from me—I saw men, but not the same men—and every man's eye was fixed on us. Then the thick brown rope just below my window quivered like a bow-string, and tightened (all the water starting from it in a sparkling shower) till it looked as firm as a bar of iron, and I held on tight, for we were swinging round. Suddenly the voice of command sang out—(I fancied with a touch of triumph in the tone)—“Let go the warp!” The thick rope sprang into the air, and wriggled like a long snake, and it was all I could do to help joining in the shouts that rang from the deck above and from the dock below. Then the very heart of the ship began to beat with a new sound, and the Scotch lad leaped like a deerhound to the window, and put his arm round my shoulder, and whispered, “That’s the screw, man! *we’re off!*”

CHAPTER XVII.

“He that tholes o’ercomes.”

“Tak’ your venture, as mony a gude ship has done.”
Scotch Proverbs.

I AM disposed to think that a ship is a place where one has occasional moments of excitement and enthusiasm that are rare elsewhere, but that it is not to be beaten (if approached) for the deadliness of the despondency to be experienced therein.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour after our start I felt much excited, and so, I think, did my companion. Shoulder to shoulder we were glued to the little round window, pinching each other when the hurrying steps hither and thither threatened to come down our way. We did not talk much, we were too busy looking out, and listening to the rushing water, and the throbbing of the screw. The land seemed to slip quickly by, countless ships, boats and steamers barely gave us time to have a look at them, though Alister (who seemed to have learned a good deal during his four days in the docks) whispered little bits of information about one and another. Then the whole shore seemed to be covered by enormous sheds, and later on it got farther off, and then the land lay distant, and it was very low and marshy and most dreary-looking, and I fancied it was becoming more difficult to keep my footing at the window; and just when Alister had been pointing out a queer red ship with one stumpy mast crowned by a sort of cage, and telling me that it was a light-ship, our own vessel began to creak and groan worse than ever, and the floor under our feet seemed to run away from them, and by the time you had got used to going down, it caught you and jerked you up again, till my head refused to think anything about anything, and I half dropped and was half helped by Alister on to the flat of my back as before.

As to him, I may as well say at once, that I never knew him affected at sea by the roughest wind that could blow, and he sat on a box and looked at me half pityingly, and half, I suppose, with the sort of curiosity I had felt about him.

“I’m feared the life’ll be a bit over rough for ye,” he said kindly. “Would ye think of going up and disclosing yourself before we’re away from all chance of getting ashore?”

“No, no!” said I, vehemently, and added more feebly, “I daresay I shall be all right soon.”

“Maybe,” said the Scotchman.

He went back to the window and gazed out,
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seeing, I have no doubt, plenty to interest him; though my eyes, if opened for a moment, only shrank back and closed again instinctively, with feelings of indescribable misery. So indefinite time went on, Alister occasionally making whispered comments which I did not hear, and did not trouble myself to ask questions about, being utterly indifferent to the answers. But I felt no temptation to give in. I only remember feeling one intense desire and it amounted to a prayer, that if these intolerable sensations did not abate, I might at any rate become master enough of them to do my duty in their teeth. The thought made me more alert, and when the Scotch lad warned me that steps were coming our way, I implored him to hide deeper under the sails, if he wished, without consideration for me, as I had resolved to face my fate at once, and be either killed or cured.

"Thank ye kindly," said Alister, "but there's small use in hiding now. They can but pitch us overboard, and I've read that drowning is by far an easier death than being starved, if ye come to that."

It was in this frame of mind that a sailor found us, and took us prisoners with so little difficulty that he drew the scarcely fair conclusion that we were the cheekiest, coolest hands of all the nasty, sneaking, longshore loafers he had ever had to deal with in all his blessed and otherwise than blessed born days. And wrathful as this outburst was, it was colourless to the indignation in his voice, when (replying to some questions from above) he answered—

"Two on 'em!"

Several other sailors came to the help of our captor, and we were dragged up the ladder and on deck, where the young Scotchman looked to better advantage than down below, and where I made the best presentment of myself that my miserable condition would allow. We were soon hauled before the captain, a sensible-faced, red-bearded man, with a Scotch accent rather harsher than Alister's, in which he harangued us in very unflattering phrases for our attempt to "steal a passage," and described the evil fate of which we were certain, if we did not work uncommonly hard for our victuals.

With one breath I and my companion asserted our willingness to do anything, and that to get a free passage as idlers was our last wish and intention. To this, amid appreciating chuckles from the crew, the captain replied, that, so sneaks and stowaways always *said*; a taunt which was too vulgar as repartee to annoy me, though I saw Alister's thin hands clenching at his sides. I don't know if the captain did, but he called

out—"Here! you lankey lad there, show your hands."

"They're no idle set," said Alister, stretching them out. He lifted his eyes as he said it, and I do not think he could have repressed the flash in them to save his life. Every detail of the scene was of breathless interest to me, and as I watched to see if the captain took offence, I noticed that (though they were far less remarkable from being buried in a fat and commonplace countenance) his eyes, like Alister's were of that bright, cold, sea-blue common among Scotchmen. He did not take offence, and I believe I was right in thinking that the boy's wasted hands struck him much as they had struck me.

"Don't speak unless I question you. How long will ye have been hanging round the docks before ye'd the impudence to come aboard here?"

"I slept four nights in the docks, sir."

"And where did ye take your meals?"

A flush crept over Alister's bony face. "I'm no' a great eater, sir," he said, with his eyes on the deck: and then suddenly lifting a glance at me out of the corner of them, he added, "the last I had was just given me by a freen."

"That'll do. Put your hands down. Can you sew?"

"I ask your pardon, sir?"

"Is the fool deaf? Can ye use a needle and thread?"

"After a rough fashion, sir, and I can knit a bit."

"Mr. Waters?"

A man with a gold band round his cap stepped forward and touched it.

"Take him to the sailmaker. He can help to patch the old fore-stay-sail on the fore-castle. And you can——"

The rest of the order was in a low voice, but Mr. Waters saluted again and replied, "Yes, sir."

The captain saluted Mr. Waters, and then as Alister moved off, he said, "You're not sick, I see. Have you sailed before?"

"From Scotland, sir."

Whether, being a Scotchman himself, the tones of Alister's voice, as it lingered on the word "Scotland," touched a soft corner in the captain's soul, or whether the blue eyes met with an involuntary feeling of kinship, or whether the captain was merely struck by Alister's powerful-looking frame, and thought he might be very useful when he was better fed, I do not know; but I feel sure that as he returned my new comrade's salute, he did so in a softened humour. Perhaps this made him doubly rough to me, and I have no doubt I looked as miserable an object as one could (not) wish to see.

"You're sick enough," he said; "stand straight, sir! we don't nurse invalids here, and if you stop you'll have to work for your food, whether you can eat it or not."

"I will, sir," said I.

"Put out your hands."

I did, and he looked keenly, first at them, and then, from head to foot, at me. And then to my horror, he asked the question I had been asked by the man who robbed me of my shilling.

"Where did you steal your slops?"

I hastened to explain. "A working-man, sir, in Liverpool, who was kind enough to advise me, said that I should have no chance of getting work on board-ship in the clothes I had on. So I exchanged them, and got these, in a shop he took me to," and being anxious to prove the truth of my tale, and also to speak with the utmost respect of everybody in this critical state of my affairs, I added: "I don't remember the name of the street, sir, but the shop was kept by a—by a Mr. Moses Cohen."

"By Mister—who?"

"Mr. Moses Cohen, sir."

When I first uttered the name, I fancied I heard some sniggering among the sailors who still kept guard over me, and this time the captain's face wrinkled, and he turned to another officer standing near him and repeated—

"Mister Moses Cohen!" and they both burst into a fit of laughter, which became a roar among the subordinates, till the captain cried—"Silence there!" and still chuckling sardonically, added, "Your suit must have been a very spic and span one, young gentleman, if *Mister* Moses Cohen accepted it in lieu of that rig out."

"I paid ten shillings as well," said I.

The laughter recommenced, but the captain looked wrathful. "Oh, you paid ten shillings as well, did you? And what the thunder and lightning have you tried to steal a passage for when you'd money to pay for one?"

"I didn't mean to steal a passage, sir," said I, "and I don't mean it now. I tried to get taken as a sailor-lad, but they seemed to expect me to have been to sea before, and to have some papers to show it. So I stowed away, and I'm very sorry if you think it dishonest, sir, but I meant to work for my passage, and I will work hard."

"And what do you suppose an ignorant land-lubber like you can do, as we don't happen to be short of public speakers!"

"I thought I could clean things, and carry coals, and do rough work till I learnt my trade, sir."

"Can you climb?" said the captain, looking at the rigging.

"I've never climbed on board-ship, sir, but I was good at athletics when I was at school, and I believe I could."

"We'll see," said the captain significantly. "And supposing you're of no use, and we kick ye overboard, can ye swim?"

"Yes, sir, and dive. I'm at home in the water."

"It's more than you are *on* it. Bo'sun!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this accomplished young gentleman off fortune, and give him something to do. Give him an oil rag and let him rub some of our brass, and stow his own. And, bo'sun!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take him first to Mr. Johnson, and say that I request Mr. Johnson to ascertain how much change Mister Moses Cohen has left him, and to take charge of it."

"Yes, sir."

The captain's witticisms raised renewed chuckling among the crew, as I followed the boatswain, duly saluting my new master as I passed him, and desperately trying to walk easily and steadily in my ordinary boots upon the heaving deck.

Mr. Johnson was the third mate, and I may as well say at once that his shrewdness and kindness, his untiring energy and constant cheerfulness, make his memory very pleasant to me and to all who served with him, and whose reasons for being grateful to him belong to all hours of the day and night, and to every department of our work and our play.

I was far too giddy to hear what the boatswain said to Mr. Johnson, but I was conscious that the third mate's eyes were scanning me closely as he listened. Then he said, "*Have* you got any money, youngster?"

"Here, sir," said I; and after some struggles I got the leather bag from my neck, and Mr. Johnson pocketed it.

"Ran away from school, I suppose?"

I tried to reply, and could not. Excitement had kept me up before the captain, but the stress of it was subsiding, and putting my arms up to get my purse had aggravated the intense nausea that was beginning to overpower me. I managed to shake my head instead of speaking, after which I thought I must have died then and there of the agony across my brow. It seemed probable that I should go far to pay for my passage by the amusement I afforded the crew. Even Mr. Johnson laughed, as he said, "He seems pretty bad. Look after him, and then let him try his hand on those stanchions—they're disgraceful. Show him how, and see that he lays on—"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And, bo'sun! don't be too rough on him just yet. We've all of us made our first voyage."

"Very true, sir."

I could have fallen at the man's feet for those few kind words, but his alert step had carried him far away; and the boatswain had gripped me by the arm, and landed me on a seat, before I could think of how to express my thanks.

"Stay where ye are, young stowaway," said he, "and I'll fetch the oil and things. But don't fall overboard! for we can't afford to send a hexpedition on a voyage of discovery harter ye."

Off went the boatswain, and by the time he came back with a bundle of brass rods under his arm, and an old sardine-tin full of a mixture of oil, vinegar, and sand, and a saturated fragment of a worn-out worsted sock, I had more or less recovered from a violent attack of sickness, and was trying to keep my teeth from being chattered out of my aching head in the fit of shivering that succeeded it.

"Now, my pea-green beauty!" said he, "pull yourself together, and bear a hand with this tackle. I'll carry the stanchions for you." I jumped up, thanked him, and took the oil tin and etceteras, feeling very grateful that he did carry the heavy brass rods for me on to the poop, where I scrambled after him, and after a short lesson in an art the secret of which appeared to be to rub hard enough and long enough, he left me with the pointed hint that the more I did within the next hour or two, the better it would be for me. "And *vicee the worsor*—hif ye learnt what *that* means when ye wos at school," he added.

Fully determined to do my best, I rubbed for the dear life, my bones and teeth still shuddering as I did so; but whatever virtue there was in my efforts was soon its own reward, for the vigorous use of my arms began to warm me, so greatly to the relief of my headache and general misery, that I began to hold myself up, and drink in the life-giving freshness of the salt breezes with something that came quite close to hope, and was not far off enjoyment. As to the stanchions, I was downright proud of them, and was rubbing away, brightening the brass, and getting the blood comfortably circulated through my body, when with the usual running and shouting, a crowd of men poured on to the poop with long-handled scrubbing-brushes, and big tubs, &c., followed by others dragging a fire-hose. No time was lost in charging the hose with water (a plentiful commodity!), and this was squirted into every hole and cranny in all directions, whilst the first lot of men rubbed and scrubbed and brushed most impartially all over the place.

I went quietly on with my work, but when the stream threatened a group of stanchions, so highly polished that I could not endure the notion of a

speck on their brightness, I lifted them out of harm's way, and with the clatter of this movement drew the attention of the plier of the hose.

"Why, bless my stars, garters, and ornaments of hall sorts!" said he; "if're ain't the young gentleman of fortin' on the poop deck in his Sunday pumps!" and without more ado he let fly the water, first at my feet and then upwards, till I was soused from head to foot, and the scrubbers and swabbers laughed at my gasps as I knew I could not have moved their sense of humour if I had had the finest wit in the world. However, I suppose they had had to take as well as give such merriment in their time; and I keenly remember Biddy's parting hint that the "good-nature of my ways" would be my best friend in this rough society. So I laughed and shook myself, and turning up my sleeves to my elbows, and my trousers to my knees, I also denuded myself of boots and socks and put them aside.

"Is this the correct fashion?" I inquired—a joke which passed muster for very good humour; and I was squirted at no more on that occasion. The chill had made me feel most miserable again, but I had found by experience that the great thing was to keep my blood circulating, and that rubbing-up the ship's brass answered this purpose exceedingly well. I rubbed it so bright, that when the boatswain came to summon me to dinner, he signified his approval in his own peculiar fashion, which appeared to be that of an acknowledged wit.

"H'm!" said he, "I'll say that for ye, young shore-loafer, that you've learnt that the best part of polishing-paste is elbow-grease. It wasn't all *parley-voo* and the pianner where you was at boarding-school!"

I said I hoped not, and laughed as respectfully as it becomes the small to do at the jokes of the great.

But when I was fairly squatted in a corner of the forecandle, with my plate on my lap, in friendly proximity to Alister, I received a far worse shock than the ship's hose had given me. For under cover of the sailors' talk (and they were even noisier at their dinner than at their work) my comrade contrived to whisper in my ear, "The pilot is still on board."

I got what comfort I could out of hearing the sailmaker praise Alister as "an uncommon handy young chap," a compliment which he enforced by a general appeal to some one to "give him" a lad that had been brought up to make himself useful, and anybody else was welcome "for him" to fine gentlemen with no learning but school learning. For this side attack on me roused the boatswain to reproduce his jokes about elbow-grease *versus* *parley-voo* and the *pianner*, and to add a general



"Without more ado he let fly the water, first at my feet and then upwards, till I was soused from head to foot." P. 68.

principle on his own account to the effect that it was nothing to him if a lad had been "edicated" in a young ladies' boarding-school, so long as he'd been taught to rub brass till you could "see something more of your face than thumbmarks in it." The general and satisfactory conclusion being (so I hoped) that we were neither of us quite useless, and

might possibly be spared the ignominy of a return voyage with the pilot.

About an hour and a half after dinner, when I was "rubbing-up" some "bright things" in the cook's galley, Alister looked in, and finding me alone, said, "Would ye dare to come on deck? We're passing under bonny big rocks, with a light-

house perched up on the height above our heads, for all the world like a big man keeping his outlook with glowering eyes."

"I don't think I dare," said I. "The cook told me not to stir till these were done. Are we going slower? That pumping noise is slower than it was, I'm sure."

"We are so," said Alister; "I'm wondering if—" He ran out without finishing his sentence, but soon returned with a face rather more colourless than usual with repressed excitement. "Jack!" he gasped, "they're lowering a boat. *The pilot's going ashore.*"

He remained with me now, sitting with his head on his hands. Suddenly a shout of two or three voices from the water was answered by a hearty cheer from the deck. By one impulse, Alister and I sprang to our feet and gripped each other by the hand; and I do not believe there were any two sailors on board who sped the parting pilot with more noise than we two made in the cook's galley.

It was gloriously true. They had kept us both. But, though I have no doubt the captain would have got rid of us if we had proved feckless, I think our being allowed to remain was largely due to the fact that the vessel had left Liverpool short of her full complement of hands. Trade was good at the time, and one man who had joined had afterwards deserted, and another youngster had been taken to hospital only the day before we sailed. He had epileptic fits, and though the second mate (whose chief quality seemed to be an impartial distrust of everybody but himself, and a burning desire to trip up his fellow-creatures at their weak points and jump upon them accordingly) expressed in very strong language his wish that the captain had not sent the lad off, but had kept him for him (the second mate) to cure, the crew seemed all of opinion that there was no "shamming" about it, and that the epileptic sailor-boy would only have fallen from one of the yards in a fit, and given more trouble than his services were worth over picking him up.

The afternoon was far from being as fine as the morning had been. Each time I turned my eyes that way it seemed to me that the grey sea was looking drearier and more restless, but I stuck steadily to some miscellaneous and very dirty work that I had been put to down below; and, as the ship rolled more and more under me, as I ran unsteadily about with buckets and the like, I began to wonder if this was the way storms came gradually on, and whether, if the ship went down to-night "with all on board," I should find courage to fit my fate.

I was meditating gloomily on this subject, when I heard a shrill whistle, and then a series of awful noises, at the sound of which every man below left

whatever he was at, and rushed on deck. I had read too many accounts of shipwrecks not to know that the deck is the place to make for, so I bolted with the rest, and caught sight of Alister flying in the same direction as we were. When we got up I looked about me as well as I could, but I saw no rocks or vessels in collision with us. The waves were not breaking over us, but four or five men standing on the bulwarks, were pulling things like monstrous grubs out of a sort of trough, and chucking them with more or less accuracy at the heads of the sailors who gathered round.

"What is it, Alister?" I asked.

"It's just the serving out of the hammocks that they sleep in," Alister replied. "I'm thinking we'll not be entitled to them."

"What's that fellow yelling about?"

"He's crying to them to respond to their names and numbers. Whisht, man! till I hear his unchristian lingo and see if he cries on us."

But in a few minutes the crowd had dispersed, and the hammock-servers with them, and Alister and I were left alone. I felt foolish, and I suppose looked so, for Alister burst out laughing and said—"Hech, laddie! it's a small matter. We'll find a corner to sleep in. And let me tell ye I've tried getting into a hammock myself, and—"

"Hi! you lads!"

In no small confusion at having been found idle and together, we started to salute the third mate, who pointed to a sailor behind him, and said—"Follow Francis, and he'll give you hammocks and blankets, and show you how to swing and stow them."

We both exclaimed—"Thank you, sir!" with such warmth that as he returned our renewed salutations he added—"I hear good accounts of both of you. Keep it up, and you'll do."

Alister's sentence had been left unfinished, but I learnt the rest of it by experience. We scrambled down after Francis till we seemed to be about the level where we had stowed away. I did not feel any the better for the stuffiness of the air and an abominable smell of black beetles, but I stumbled along till we all arrived in a very tiny little office where the purser sat surrounded by bags of ships' biscuits (which they pleasantly call "bread" at sea) and with bins of sugar, coffee, &c., &c. I daresay the stuffiness made him cross (as the nasty smells used to make us in Uncle Henry's office), for he used a good deal of bad language, and seemed very unwilling to let us have the hammocks and blankets. However, Francis got them and banged us well with them before giving them to us to carry. They were just like the others—canvas-coloured sausages wound about with tarred rope; and warning us to observe how they were fastened up, as we should

have to put them away "ship-shape" the following morning, Francis helped us to unfasten and "swing" them in the fore-castle. There were hooks in the beams, so that part of the business was easy enough, but, when bedtime came, I found that getting into my hammock was not as easy as getting it ready to get into.

The sailmaker helped Alister out of his difficulties at once, by showing him how to put his two hands in the middle of his hammock and wriggle himself into it and roll his blankets round him in seaman-like fashion. But my neighbours only watched with delight when I first sent my hammock flying by trying to get in at the side as if it were a bed, and then sent myself flying out on the other side after getting in. As I picked myself up I caught sight of an end of thick rope hanging from a beam close above my hammock, and being a good deal nettled by my own stupidity and the jeers of the sailors, I sprang at the rope, caught it, and swinging myself up, I dropped quietly and successfully into my new resting-place. Once fairly in and rolled in my blanket, I felt as snug as a chrysalis in his cocoon, and (besides the fact that lying down is a great comfort to people who are not born with sea-legs), I found the gentle swaying of my hammock a delightful relief from the bumping, jumping, and jarring of the ship. I said my prayers, which made me think of my mother, and cost me some tears in the privacy of darkness; but, as I wept, there came back the familiar thought that I had "much to be thankful for," and I added the General Thanksgiving with an "especially" in the middle of it (as we always used to have when my father read prayers at home, after anything like Jem and me getting well of scarlet fever, or a good harvest being all carried).

I got all through my "especially," and what with thinking of the workman, and dear old Biddy, and Alister, and Mr. Johnson, and the pilot, it was a very long one; and I think I finished the Thanksgiving and said the Grace of our LORD after it. But I cannot be quite sure, for it was such a comfort to be at peace, and the hammock swung and rocked till it cradled me to sleep.

A light sleep, I suppose, for I dreamed very vividly of being at home again, and that I had missed getting off to sea after all; and that the ship had only been a dream. I thought I was rather sorry it was not real, because I wanted to see the world, but I was very glad to be with Jem, and I thought he and I went down to the farm to look for Charlie, and they told us he was sitting up in the ash-tree at the end of the field. In my dream I did not feel at all surprised that Cripple Charlie should have got into the ash-tree, or at finding him there high up among the branches

looking at a spider's web with a magnifying glass. But I thought that the wind was so high I could not make him hear, and the leaves and boughs tossed so that I could barely see him; and when I climbed up to him, the branch on which I sat swayed so deliciously that I was quite content to rock myself and watch Charlie in silence, when suddenly it cracked, and down I came with a hard bang on my back.

I woke and sat up, and found that the latter part of my dream had come true, as a lump on the back of my head bore witness for some days. Francis had playfully let me down "with a run by the head," as it is called; that is, he had undone my hammock-cord and landed me on the floor. He left Alister in peace, and I can only think of two reasons for his selecting me for the joke. First that the common sailors took much more readily to Alister from his being more of their own rank in birth and upbringing, though so vastly superior by education. And secondly, that I was the weaker of the two; for what I have seen of the world has taught me that there are plenty of strong people who will not only let the weaker go to the wall, but who find an odd satisfaction in shoving and squeezing them there.

However, if I was young and sea-sick, I was not quite helpless, happily; I refasted my hammock, and got into it again, and being pretty well tired out by the day's work, I slept that sleep of the weary which knows no dream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Yet more! The billows and the depths have more:
High hearts and brave are gathered to thy breast!"

* * * * *
Keep thy red gold and gems, thou stormy grave!
Give back the true and brave!"

Felicia Hemans.

"To them their duty was clear, and they did it successfully; and the history of the island is written briefly in that little formula!"

Daily Telegraph, Dec. 5, 1878.

I DID not feel as if I had been asleep five minutes, when I was rudely awakened, of course by noise, whistling and inarticulate roaring, and I found that it was morning, and that the boatswain's mate was "turning the hands up" to wash decks. Alister was ready, and I found that my toilet was, if possible, shorter than at Snuffy's in winter.

"We puts hon our togs fust, and takes our shower-baths harterwards," the boatswain humorously explained, as he saw me trying to get the

very awkward collar of my "slops" tidy as I followed with the crowd.

The boatswain was a curious old fellow. He was born in London, "within sound of Bow bells," as he told me; but though a Cockney by birth, he could hardly be called a native of anywhere but the world at large. He had sailed in all seas, and seemed to have tried his hand at most trades. He had at one time been a sort of man-of-all-work in a boys' school, and I think it was partly from this, and partly out of opposition to the sailmaker, that he never seemed to grudge my not having been born a poor person, or to fancy I gave myself airs (which I never did), or to take a pleasure in making me feel the roughest edge of the menial work I had to do, like so many of the men. But he knew very well just where things did feel strangest and hardest to me, and showed that he knew it by many a bit of not unkindly chaff.

His joke about the shower-bath came very strictly true to me. We were all on the main deck, bare-armed and bare-legged, mopping and slopping and swabbing about in the cold sea-water, which was liberally supplied to us by the steam-pump and hose. I had been furnished with a *squeegee* (a sort of scraper made of india-rubber at the end of a broomstick), and was putting as much "elbow-grease" into my work as renewed sea-sickness left me strength for, when the boatswain's mate turned the hose upon me once more. I happened to be standing rather loosely, and my thoughts had flown home on the wings of a wonder what Martha would think of this way of scrubbing a floor—all wedded as the domestic mind is to hairy flannel and sticky soap and swollen knees,—when the stream of sea-water came in full force against my neck, and I and my squeegee went head-over-heels into the lee scuppers. It was the boatswain himself who picked me out, and who avenged me on his subordinate by a round of abuse which it was barely possible to follow, so mixed were the metaphors, and so cosmopolitan the slang.

On the whole I got on pretty well that day, and began to get accustomed to the motion of the ship, in spite of the fact that she rolled more than on the day before. The sky and sea were grey enough when we were swabbing the decks in the early morning; as the day wore on, they only took the deeper tints of gathering clouds which hid the sun.

If the weather was dull, our course was not less so. We only saw one ship from the deck, a mail-steamer, as neat and trim as a yacht, which passed us at a tremendous pace, with a knot of officers on the bridge. Some black objects bobbing up and down in the distance were pointed out to me as porpoises, and a good many seagulls went by,

flying landwards. Not only was the sky overcast, but the crew seemed to share the depression of the barometer, which, as everybody told everybody else, was falling rapidly. The captain's voice rang out in brief but frequent orders, and the officers clustered in knots on the bridge, their gold capbands gleaming against the stormy sky.

I worked hard through the day, and was sick off and on as the ship rolled, and the great green waves hit her on the bows, and ran away along her side, and the wind blew and blew, and most of the sails were hauled in and made fast, and one or two were reefed up close, and the big chimney swayed, and the threatening clouds drifted forwards at a different pace from our own, till my very fingers felt giddy with unrest; but not another practical joke did I suffer from that day, for every man's hand was needed for the ship.

In the afternoon she had rolled so heavily in the trough of the large waves, that no one made any pretence of finding his sea-legs strong enough to keep him steady without clutching here and there for help, and I had been thankful, in a brief interval when nobody had ordered me to do anything, to scramble into a quiet corner of the fore-castle and lie on the boards, rolling as the ship rolled, and very much resigned to going down with her if she chose to go.

Towards evening it was thick and foggy, but as the sun set it began to clear, and I heard the men saying that the moon (which was nearly at the full) would make a clear night of it. It was unquestionably clearer overhead, and the waves ran smoother, as if the sea were recovering its temper, and Alister and I went below at 9 P.M. and turned into our hammocks for a few hours' sleep, before taking our part in the night-watch that lasts from 12 midnight till 4 A.M.

It is astonishing what a prompt narcotic the knowledge that you'll have to be up again in an hour or two is. Alister and I wasted no time in conversation. He told me the fall in the barometer was "by-ordinary" (which I knew as well as he); and I told him the wind was undoubtedly falling (which he knew as well as I): and after this inevitable interchange of the uppermost news and anxieties of the occasion, we bade GOD bless each other, and I said the prayers of my babyhood because they were shortest, and fell fast asleep.

The noises that woke us were new noises, but they made up the whole of that peculiar sound which is the sum of human excitement. "We are going down this time," was my thought, and I found myself less philosophical about it than I had imagined. Neither Alister nor I were long in putting on our clothes, and we rushed up on deck without exchanging a word. By the time we got

there, where the whole ship's crew had gone before us, we were as wildly excited as any one of them, though we had not a notion what it was all about. I knew enough now for the first glance to tell me that the ship was in no special danger. Even I could tell that the gale had gone down, the night was clear, and between the scudding of black clouds with silver linings, the moon and stars shone very beautifully, though it made one giddy to look at them from the weird way in which the masts and yards seemed to whip across the sky.

We still rolled, and when the side of the ship went up, it felt almost overhead, and I could see absolutely nothing of the sea, which was vexatious, as that was obviously the point of interest. The rigging on that side was as full of men as a bare garden-tree might be of sparrows, and all along the lee bulwarks they sat and crouched like seabirds on a line of rock. Suddenly we rolled, down went the leeside, and I with it, but I caught hold of the lowest step of the fore-castle ladder and sat fast. Then as we dipped I saw all that they were seeing from the masts and rigging—the yet restless sea with fast-running waves, alternately inky black, and of a strange bright metallic lead-colour, on which the scud as it drove across the moon made queer racing shadows. And it was on this stormy sea that every eye from the captain's to the cook's was strained.

Roll! down we went again to starboard, and up went the bulwarks and I could see nothing but the sky and the stars, and the masts and yards whipping across them as before, though the excitement grew till I could bear it no longer, and scrambled up the ladder on to the fore-castle, and pushed my way to the edge and lay face downwards, holding on for my life that I might not be blown away, whilst I was trying to see what was to be seen.

I found myself by Alister once more, and he helped me to hold on, and pointed where every one else was pointing. There was a lull in the eager talking of the men, and the knot of captain and the officers on the bridge stood still and Alister roared through the wind into my ear—"Bide a wee, the moon'll be out again."

I waited, and the cloud passed from her face or she sailed from beneath it, and at the same instant I saw a streak of light upon the water in which a black object bobbed up and down as the porpoises had bobbed, and all the men burst out again, and a crowd rushed up on to the fore-castle.

"It's half a mile aft."—"A bit of wreck."—"An old sugar hog'shead."—"The emperor of the porpoises."—"Is it the sea serpent ye're maning?"—"Will hany gentleman lend me 'is hopera-glass?"—"I'm blessed if I don't think we're going to go half-speed. I sailed seven years

in the 'Amiable' with old Savage, and I'm blessed if he ever put her a point out of her course for anything. 'Every boat for herself, and the sea for us all,' he used to say, and allus kept his eyes forwards in foul weather."—"Aisy, Tom, aisy, ye're out of it entirely. It's the Humane Society's gold medal we'll all be getting for saving fire-wood."—"Stow your jaw, Pat, *that's* not wreck. it's—"

At this moment the third mate's voice rang through the ship—

"A boat bottom up!"

The men passed from chaff to a silence whose eagerness could be felt, through which another voice came through the wind from the poop—"there's something on her!" and I turned that way, and saw the captain put down his glass, and put his hand to his mouth; and when he sang out "A MAN"! we all sprang to our feet, and opened our lips, but the boatswain put up his hand, and cried, "Silence, fore and aft! Steady, lads! Look to the captain!"

The gold cap-bands glittered close together, and then, clear to be seen in a sudden gleam of moonlight the captain leaned forward and shouted to the crew, "Fo'cs'le there!" And they sang out, "Aye, aye, sir!"

"Volunteers for the whaleboat!"

My heart was beating fast enough, but I do not think I could have counted a dozen throbs, before, with a wild hurrah, every man had leaped from the fore-castle, Alister among them, and I was left alone.

I was just wondering if I could possibly be of use, when I heard the captain's voice again. (He had come down, and was where the whaleboat was hanging, which, I learned, was fitted like a life-boat, and the crew were crowding round him.)

"Steady, lads! Stand back. Come as you're called. Thunder and lightning, we want to man the boat, not sink her. Mr. Johnson!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"A! B! C! D!" &c.

"Here, sir!" "Here, sir!" "Here, sir!"

"Fall back there! Thank you all, my lads, but she's manned."

A loud cheer drowned every other sound, and I saw men busy with the boat, and Alister coming back with a dejected air, and the captain jumping up and down, and roaring louder than the wind: "Steward! rum, and a couple of blankets. Look sharp. Stand back; in you go; steady! Now, mind what I say; I shall bear up towards the boat. Hi, there! Stand by the lowering-tackle, and when I say 'Now!' lower away handsomely and steadily. Are you ready, Mr. Johnson? Keep steady, all, and fend her off well when you touch

the water. Mr. Waters ! let her go off a point or two to the north'ard. Half speed ; port a little—steady ! All ready in the boat ? ”

“ Aye, aye, sir ! ”

“ God bless you. Steady—ready—Now ! ”

I hardly know which more roused my amazement and admiration—the behaviour of the men or the behaviour of the whaleboat. Were these alert and silent seamen, sitting side by side, each with his oar held upright in his hand, and his eyes upon his captain, the rowdy roughs of the fore-castle ? And were those their like companions who crowded the bulwarks, and bent over to cheer, and bless, and *envy* them ?

As to boats—the only one I had been accustomed to used to be launched on the canal with scraping and shoving, and struggling and balancing, and we did occasionally upset her—but when the captain gave the word, the ship's whaleboat and its crew were smoothly lowered by a patent apparatus till it all but touched the big black waves that ran and roared at it. Then came a few moments of intense anxiety till the boat was fairly clear of the ship ; but even when it was quite free, and the men bending to their oars, I thought more than once that it had gone down for ever on the other side of the hills and dales of water which kept hiding it completely from all except those who were high up upon the masts. It was a relief when we could see it, miserable speck as it looked, and we all strained our eyes after it, through many difficulties from the spiteful ways of the winds and waves and clouds, which blinded and buffeted and drenched us when we tried to look, and sent black veils of shadow to hide our comrades from our eyes. In the teeth of the elements, however, the captain was bearing up towards the other boat, and it was now and then quite possible to see with the naked eye that she was upside down, and that a man was clinging to her keel. At such glimpses an inarticulate murmur ran through our midst, but for the most part we, who were only watching, were silent till the whaleboat was fairly alongside of the object of her gallant expedition. Then by good luck the moon sailed forth and gave us a fair view, but it was rather a disappointing one, for the two boats seemed to do nothing but bob about like two burnt corks in the moonlight, and we began to talk again.

“ What's she doing ? ”—“ The LORD knows ! ”—“ Something's gone wrong. ”—“ Why doesn't she go nearer ? ”—“ Cos she'd be stove in, ye fool ! ”—“ Gude save us ! they're both gone. ”—“ Not they, they're to the left ; but what the winds and waves they're after— ”—“ They're trying to make him hear, likely enough, and they might as well call on my grandmother. He's as dead as a herring. ”—

“ Whisht ! whisht ! He's a living soul ! Hech, sirs ! there's nought but the grip o' despair would haud a man on the keel o'f's boat in waves like yon. ”—“ Silence, all ! ”

We turned our heads, for a voice rang from the look-out—

“ Man overboard from the whaleboat ! ”

The men were so excited, and crowded so together, that I could hardly find a peeping-place.

“ He's got him. ”—“ Nay, they're both gone. ”—

“ Man ! I'm just thinking that it's ill interfering with the designs of Providence. We may lose Peter and not save Paul. ”—“ Stow your discourses, Sandy ! ”—“ They're hauling in our man, and time they did. ”

The captain's voice now called to the first mate—

“ Do you make it one or both, Mr. Waters ? ”

“ Both, sir ! ”

“ Thank GOD ! ”

We hurried again, and the whaleboat-men replied—but their cheer only came faintly to us, like a wail upon the wind.

Several men of our group were now called to work, and I was ordered below to bring up a hammock, and swing it in the steerage. I was vexed, as I would have given anything to have helped to welcome the whaleboat back.

When the odd jobs I had been called to were done with, and I returned to the deck, it was just too late to see her hauled up. I could not see over the thick standing group of men, and I did not, of course, dare to push through them to catch sight of our heroes and the man they had saved. But a little apart from the rest, two Irish sailors were standing and bandying the harshest of brogues with such vehemence that I drew near, hoping at least to hear something of what I could not see. It was a spirited, and one would have guessed an angry dialogue, so like did it sound to the yapping and snapping of two peppery tempered terriers. But it was only vehement, and this was the sum of it.

“ Bedad ! but it's quare ye must have felt at the time. ”

“ I did not, unless it would be when Tom stepped out into the water, GOD bless him ! with the rope aisy round his waist, and the waves drowning him intirely, and the corpse holding on to the boat's bottom for the dear life. ”

“ Pat ! ” said the other in mysterious tones, “ would that that's hanging round his neck be the presarving of him, what ? ”

“ And why wouldn't it ? But isn't he the big fool to be having it dangling where the wash of a wave, or a pick-pocket, or a worse temptation than either might be staling it away from him ? ”

“ And where else would he put it ? ”

"Did ye ever git the sight of mine?"

"I did not."

"On the back of me?"

"What?"

"Look here, now!" cried Pat, in the tones of one whose patience was entirely exhausted. His friend drew nearer, and I also ventured to accept an invitation not intended for me, so greatly was my curiosity roused by what the men said.

Pat turned his back to us as rapidly as he had spoken, and stooping at about half-leap-frog-angle, whipped his wet shirt upwards out of his loosely-strapped trousers, baring his back from his waist to his shoulder blades. The moon was somewhat overcast, but there was light enough for us to see a grotesque semblance of the Crucifixion tattooed upon his flesh in more than one colour, and some accompanying symbols and initials which we could hardly distinguish.

"Now am I safe for Christian burial or not, in the case I'd be misfortunate enough to be washed up on the shores of a haythen country?"

"Ye are so!"

I never saw a funnier sight than Pat craning and twisting his head in futile efforts to look at it under his own arm.

"It's a foin piece of work, I'm told," said he.

"They told ye no less than the truth that said that, Pat. It's a mighty foin piece of work."

"They all say so that see it," sighed Pat, tucking his shirt in again, "and that'll be ivry soul but meself, worse luck!"

"Shaughnessey!"

"Sir!"

Pat ran off, and as I turned I saw that the crew of the whaleboat were going below with a crowd of satellites, and that a space was cleared through which I could see the man they had saved still lying on the deck, with the captain kneeling at his head, and looking back as if he were waiting for something. And at that moment the moon shone out once more, and showed me a sight that I'll forget when I forget you—Dennis O'Moore!

It was a lad that they had saved, not a full-grown man, except in the sense of his height, which was nearly an inch beyond Alister's. He was insensible, and I thought he was dead, so deathlike was the pallor of his face in contrast with the dark curls of his head and the lashes of his closed eyes. We were dipping to leeward, his head rolled a little on the rough pillow that had been heaped to raise him, and his white face against the inky waves reminded me of the face of the young lord in Charlie's father's church, who died abroad, and a marble figure of him was sent home from Italy, with his dog lying at his feet. His

shoulders were raised as well as his head, and his jacket and shirt had both been washed open by the waves.

And that was how I got the key to the Irishmen's dialogue. For round the lad's throat was a black ribbon, pendant from which a small cross of ebony was clear to be seen upon his naked breast; and on this there glittered in the moonlight a silver image of the Redeemer of the World.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Why, what's that to you, if my eyes I'm a wiping?"

A tear is a pleasure, d'ye see, in its way;

'Tis nonsense for trifles, I own, to be piping,

But they that ha'n't pity, why I pities they.

* * * * *

The heart and the eyes, you see feel the same motion,

And if both shed their drops, 'tis all the same end;

And thus 'tis that every tight lad of the ocean

Sheds his blood for his country, his tears for his friend."

Charles Dibdin.

IF one wants to find the value of all he has learned in the way of righteousness, common sense, and real skill of any sort; or to reap most quickly what he has sown to obedience, industry, and endurance, let him go out and rough it in the world.

There he shall find that a conscience early trained to resist temptation and to feel shame will be to him the instinctive clutch that may now and again—in an ungraceful, anyhow fashion—keep him from slipping down to perdition, and save his soul alive. There he shall find that whatever he has really learned by labour or grasped with inborn talent, will sooner or later come to the surface to his credit and for his good; but that what he swaggers will not even find fair play. There, in brief, he shall find his level—a great matter for most men. There, in fine, he will discover that there being a great deal of human nature in all men, and a great deal that is common to all lives—if he has learned to learn and is good-natured withal, he may live pretty comfortably anywhere—

"As a rough rule,

The rough world's a good school,"—

and if there are a few parlour-boarders it is very little advantage to them.

For my own part I was almost startled to find how quickly I was beginning to learn something of the ways of the ship and her crew; and though, when I asked for information about all the various appliances which come under the comprehensive sea-name of "tackle," I was again and again made the victim of a hoax, I soon learned to correct one piece of information by another, and to feel less of an April fool and more of a sailor. Reading sea-

novels had not really taught me much, for there was not one in all that the Jew-clerk lent or sold me which *explained* ship's language and customs. But the schoolmaster had given me many useful hints, and experience soon taught me how to apply them.

The watch in which Alister and I shared just after we picked up Dennis O'Moore, was naturally very much enlivened by news and surmises regarding our new "hand." Word soon came up from below that he was alive and likely to recover, and for a brief period I found my society in great request, because I had been employed in some fetching and carrying between the galley and the steerage, and had "heard the drowned man groan." We should have gossiped more than we did if the vessel had not exacted unusual attention, for the winds and the waves had "plenty of mischief in 'em" yet, as I was well able to testify when I was sent aft to help the man at the wheel.

"That'll take the starch out o' yer Sunday stick-ups!" said the boatswain's mate, on hearing where I was bound for, when he met me clinging to the wet deck with my stocking-feet, and catching with my hands at every bit of tackle capable of giving support. And as I put out all my strength to help the steersman to force his wheel in the direction he meant it to go, and the salt spray smacked my face and soaked my slops, and every wind of heaven seemed to blow down my neck and up my sleeves and trowsers—I heartily agreed with him.

The man I was helping never spoke, except to shout some brief order into my ear or an occasional reply to the words of command which rang over our heads from the captain on the bridge. Of course I did not speak, I had quite enough to do to keep my footing and take my small part in this fierce biting and bridling of the elements; but uncomfortable as it was, I "took a pride and pleasure in it," as we used to say at home, and I already felt that strenuous something which blows in sea-breezes and gives vigour to mind and body even when it chills you to the bone.

That is, to some people; there are plenty of men, as I have since discovered, who spend their lives at sea and hate it to the end. Boy and man, they do their hard duty and live by its pitiful recompense. They know the sea as well as other mariners, are used to her uncertain ways, bear her rough usage, control her stormy humours, learn all her moods, and *never feel her charm*.

I have seen two such cases, and I have heard of more, yarned with all their melancholy details during those night watches in which men will tell you the ins and outs of many a queer story that they "never talk about." And it has convinced me that there is no more cruel blunder than to send

a boy to sea, if there is good reason to believe that he will never like it; unless it be that of withholding from its noble service those sailor lads born, in whose ears the seashell will murmur till they die.

It had murmured in mine, and enticed me to my fate. I thought so now that I knew the roughest of the other side of the question, just as much as when I sat comfortably on the frilled cushion of the round-backed armchair and read the 'Penny Numbers' to the beemaster. Barefoot, bare-headed, cold, wet, seasick, hard worked and half-rested, would I even now exchange the life I had chosen for the life I had left?—for the desk next to the Jew-clerk, for the partnership, to be my uncle's heir, to be mayor, to be member? I asked myself the question as I stood by the steersman, and with every drive of the wheel I answered it—"No, Moses! No! No!"

It is not wise to think hard when you are working hard at mechanical work, in a blustering wind and a night watch. Fatigue and open air make you sleepy, and thinking makes you forget where you are, and if your work is mechanical you do it unconsciously, and may fall asleep over it. I dozed more than once, and woke with the horrible idea that I had lost my hold, and was not doing my work. That woke me effectually, but even then I had to look at my hands to see that they were there. I pushed, but I could not feel, my fingers were so numb with cold.

The second time I dozed and started again, I heard the captain's voice close beside us. He was bawling upwards now, to Mr. Waters on the bridge. Then he pushed me on one side and took my place at the wheel, shouting to the steersman—"I meant the Scotch lad, not that boy."

"He's strong enough, and steady too," was the reply.

They both drove the wheel in silence, and I held on by a coil of heavy rope, and sucked my fingers to warm them, and very salt they tasted. Then the captain left the wheel and turned to me again.

"Are you cold?"

"Rather, sir."

"You may go below, and see if the cook can spare you a cup of coffee."

"Thank you, sir."

"But first find Mr. Johnson, and send him here."

"Yes, sir."

Whilst the captain was talking, I began to think of Dennis O'Moore, and how he groaned, and to wonder whether it was true that he would get better, and whether it would be improper to ask the captain, who would not be likely to humbug me, if he answered at all.

"Well?" said the captain sharply, "what are you standing there like a stuck pig for?"

I saluted. "Please, sir, *will* he get better?"

"What the —— Oh, yes. And hi, you!"

"Yes, sir?"

"He's in the steerage. You may go and see if he wants anything, and attend on him. You may remain below at present."

"Thank you, sir."

I lost no time in finding Mr. Johnson, and I got a delicious cup of coffee and half a biscuit from the cook, who favoured me in consequence of the conscientious scouring I had bestowed upon his pans. Then mightily warmed and refreshed, I made my way to the side of the hammock I had swung for the rescued lad, and by the light of a swinging lamp saw his dark head buried in his arms.

When I said, "Do you want anything?" he lifted his face with a jerk, and looked at me.

"Not I—much obliged," he said, smiling, and still staring hard. He had teeth like the half-caste, but the resemblance stopped there.

"The captain said I might come and look after you, but if you want to go to sleep, do," said I.

"Why would I, if you'll talk to me a bit?" was his reply; and resting his head on the edge of his hammock and looking me well over, he added, "Did they pick you up as well?"

I laughed and wrung some salt water out of my sleeve.

"No. I've not been in the sea, but I've been on deck, and it's just as wet. It always *is* wet at sea," I added in a tone of experience.

His eyes twinkled as if I amused him. "That, indeed? And yourself, are ye—a midshipman?"

It had been taken for granted that our new hand was "a gentleman." I never doubted it, though he spoke with an accent that certainly recalled old Biddy Macartney; a sort of soft ghost of a brogue with a turn up at the end of it, as if every sentence came sliding and finished with a spring, and I did wish I could have introduced myself as a midshipman—instead of having to mutter, "No, I'm a stowaway."

He raised himself higher in his hammock.

"A stowaway? What fun! And what made ye go? Were ye up to some kind of diversion at home, and had to come out of it, eh? Or were ye bored to extinction, or what? (Country life in England is mighty dull, so they tell me.) I suppose it was French leave that ye took, as ye say you're a stowaway? I'm asking ye a heap of impertinent questions, bad manners to me!"

Which was true. But he asked them so kindly and eagerly, I could only feel that sympathy is a very pleasant thing, even when it takes the form of a catechism that is all questions, and no room

for the answers. Moreover, I suspect that he rattled on partly to give me time to leave off blushing and feel at ease with him.

"I ran away because of several things," said I. "I always did want to see the world"——("And why wouldn't ye?" my new friend hastily interpolated). "But even if I had stayed at home I don't believe I should ever have got to like being a lawyer"——("Small chance of it, I should say, the quill-driving thievery!") "It was my uncle's office"——("I ask his pardon and yours.") "Oh, you may say what you like. I never could get on with him. I don't mean that he was cruel to me in the least, though I think he behaved shabbily——"

"Faith, it's a way they have! I've an uncle myself that's a sort of first cousin of my father's, and six foot three in his stockings, without a drop of good-nature in the full length of him."

"Where is your home?" said I, for it certainly was my turn to ask questions.

"Where would it be but ould Ireland?" And after a moment's pause he added, "They call me Dennis O'Moore. What's *your* name, ye enterprising little stowaway?"

I told him. "And where were you going in your boat, and how did you get upset?" I asked.

He sighed. "It was the old hooker we started in, bad luck to her!"

"Is that the name of the boat you were holding on to?"

"That boat? No! We borrowed *her*—and now ye remind me, I wouldn't be surprised if Tim Brady was missing her by this, for I had no leisure to ask his leave at the time, and, as a rule, we take our own coracle in the hooker——"

"What *is* a hooker?" I interrupted, for I was resolved to know.

"What's a hooker? A hooker—what a catechetical little chatterbox ye are! A man can't get a word in edgeways—a hooker's a boat. Ours was a twenty-ton, half-decked, cutter-rigged sort of thing, built for nothing in particular, and always used for everything. It was lucky for me we took Tim Brady's boat instead of the coracle, or I'd be now where—where poor Barney is. Oh, Barney, Barney! How'll I ever get over it? Why did ye never learn to swim, so fond of the water as ye were? Why couldn't ye hold on to me when I got a good grip of ye! Barney, dear, I've a notion in my heart that ye left your hold on purpose, and threw away your own life that ye mightn't risk mine. And now I'll never know, for ye'll never be able to tell me. Tim Brady's boat would have held two as easy as one, Barney, and maybe the old hooker'd have weathered the storm with a few more repairs about her, that the squire always

intended, as no one knows better than yourself! Oh, dear! oh, dear! But—Heaven forgive us!—putting off's been the ruin of the O'Moores from time out of mind. And now you're dead and gone—dead and gone! But oh, Barney, Barney, if prayers can give your soul ease, you'll not want them while Dennis O'Moore has breath to pray!"

I was beginning to discover that one of the first wonders of the world is that it contains a great many very good people, who are quite different from oneself and one's near relations. For I really was not conceited enough to disapprove of my new friend because he astonished me, though he certainly did do so. From the moment when Barney (whatever Barney might be) came into his head, everything else apparently went out of it. I am sure he quite forgot me.

For my own part I gazed at him in blank amazement. I was not used to seeing a man give way to his feelings in public, still less to seeing a man cry in company, and least of all to see a man say his prayers when he was neither getting up nor going to bed, nor at church, nor at family worship, and before a stranger too! For, as he finished his sentence he touched his curls, and then the place where his crucifix lay, and then made a rapid movement from shoulder to shoulder, and then buried his head in his hands, and lay silent, praying, I had no manner of doubt, for "Barney's" soul.

His prayers did not take him very long, and he finished with a big sigh, and lifted his head again. When his eyes met mine he blushed, and said, "I ask your pardon, Jack; I'd forgotten ye. You're a kind-hearted little soul, and I'm mighty dull company for ye."

"No, you're not," said I. "But—I'm very sorry for you. Was 'Barney' your—?" and I stopped because I really did not know what relationship to suggest that would account for the outburst I had witnessed.

"Ah! ye may well say what was he—for what wasn't he—to me, anyhow? Jack! my mother died when I was born, and never a soul but Barney brought me up, for I wouldn't let 'em. He'd come with her from her old home when she married; and when she lay dead he was let into the room to look at her pretty face once more. Times out of mind has he told me how she lay, with the black lashes on her white cheeks, and the black crucifix on her breast, that they were going to bury with her; the women howling, and me kicking up an indecent row in a cradle in the next apartment, carrying on like a Turk if the nurse came near me, and most outrageously disturbing the chamber of death. And what does Barney do, when he's said a prayer by the side of the mistress, but ask for

the crucifix off her neck, that she'd worn all her girlhood? If the women howled before, they double-howled then, and would have turned him out neck and crop, but my father lifted his head from where he was lying speechless in a kind of a fit at the foot of the bed, and says he, 'Barney Barton! ye knew the sweet lady that lies there long before that too brief privilege was mine. Ye served her well, and ye've served me well for her sake; whatever ye ask for of her's in this hour ye'll get, Barney Barton. She trusted ye—and I may.' 'GOD bless ye, squire,' says Barney; and what does he do but go up to her and unloose the ribbon from her throat with his own hands. And away he went with the crucifix, past the women that couldn't get a sound out of them now, and past my father as silent as themselves, and into the room where I lay kicking up the devil's own din in my cradle. And when he held it up to me, with the light shining on the silver, and the black ribbons hanging down, never believe him if I didn't stop squalling, and stretch out my hands with a smile as sweet as sunshine. And Barney tied it round my neck, and took me into his arms. And they said he spoke never a word when they told him my mother was dead, and shed never a tear when he saw her lie, but he sobbed his heart out over me."

"You may well care for him!" said I.

"Indeed I may. He kept my mother's memory green in my heart, and he taught me all ever I knew but books. He taught me to walk, and he taught me to ride, and shooting, and fishing, and such like country diversions; and strange to say, he taught me to swim, the way they learn in my mother's country, with a bundle of bullrushes—for the old man couldn't swim a stroke himself, or he might be here now, alive and hearty, please GOD."

"Were there only you and he in the hooker?"

"That's all. It was altogether sheer madness, for the old boat was barely fit for a day's fishing in fine weather, and though Barney nearly killed himself overhauling her, and patching her sails, I doubt if he knew very well what he was after. I've been thinking, Jack, that his mind was not what it was. He was always a bit obstinate, if he got a notion into his head, but of late the squire himself couldn't turn him. When he wanted to do a thing about the place that Barney didn't approve, if he didn't give in (as he was apt to do, being easy-tempered) I can tell ye he had to do it on the sly. That was how he ordered the new ploughs that nearly broke Barney's heart, both because of being new-fangled machines, and ready money having to be paid for them. 'I'll see the ould place ruined before ye come to your own, Master Dennis,' he

told me. And—Jack! that's another thing makes me think what I tell ye. He was for ever talking as if the place was coming to me, and I've two brothers older than myself, let alone my sister. But ye might as well reason with the rock of Croagh Patrick! Well, if he didn't ask my father to let him and me run round in the hooker with a load of seaweed for Tim Brady's farm, and of course we got leave, and started as pleasant as could be; barring that if Barney'd been a year or two younger, there'd have been wigs on the green over the cold potatoes, before we got off."

"*Wigs on the green over cold potatoes?*" I repeated, in bewilderment.

"Tst! tst! little Saxon! I mean we'd have had a row over the provisions. It wasn't two hours' run round to Tim Brady's, and I found the old man stowing away half a peck of cold boiled potatoes, and big bottles of tea, and goodness knows what. 'Is it for ballast ye're using the potatoes, Barney?' says I. 'Mind your own business, Master Dennis'—(and I could see he was cross as two sticks),—'and leave the provisioning to them that understands it,' says he. 'How many meals d'ye reckon to eat between this and Tim Brady's?' I went on, just poking my fun at him, when—would ye believe it?—the old fellow fired up like a sky-rocket, and asked me if I grudged him the bit of food he ate, and Heaven knows what besides. 'Is it Dennis O'Moore you're speaking to?' says I, for I've not got the squire's easy temper, God forgive me! We were mighty near to a quarrel, Jack, I can tell ye, but some shadow of a notion flitting across my brain that the dear soul was not responsible entirely, stopped my tongue, and something else stopped his which I didn't know till we got to Tim Brady's, and found that all we wanted with him was to borrow his boat, and that the seaweed business was no better than a blind; for Barney had planned it all out that we were to go down to Galway and fetch the new ploughs home in the hooker, to save the cost of the land-carriage. 'Sure it's bad enough for the squire to be soiling his hands with trumpery made by them English thieves, that's no more conscience over bothering a gentleman for money nor if he was one of themselves,' said Barney; 'sorra a halfpenny shall the railway rogues rob him of.' Ah, little stowaway, ye may guess my delight! And hadn't we glorious weather at first, and wasn't the dear old man happy and proud! I can tell ye I yelled, and I sang, and I laughed, when I felt the old hooker begin to bound on the swell when we got out into the open, but not a look would Barney turn on me for minding the boat; but I could hear him chuckling to himself and muttering about the railway rogues. It wasn't much time we either of us had for talking, by-and-bye. I steered

and saw to the main sheet, and Barney did look-out and minded the foresail, Tim Brady's boat towing astern, getting such a dance as it never had before, and at last dragging upside down. We'd one thing in our favour, anyhow. There was no disputing or disturbing of our minds as to whether we'd turn back or not, for the gale was at our backs; and the old hooker was like my father's black mare—you might guide her, but she was neither to stop nor turn. How the gallant old boat held out as she did, Heaven knows! It was not till the mainsail had split into ribbons with a noise like a gun going off, and every seam was strained to leaking, and the sea came in faster than we could bale it out, that we righted Tim Brady's tub and got into her, and bade the old hooker good-bye. The boat was weather-tight enough—it was a false move of Barney's capsized her,—and I'd a good hold of her with one hand when I gripped him with the other. Oh! Barney dear! Why would ye always have your own way? Oh, why—why did ye lose your hold? Ye thought all hope was over, darling, didn't ye? Ah, if ye had but known the brave hearts that—"

I suppose it was because I was crying as well as Dennis that I did not see Mr. Johnson till he was standing by the Irish boy's hammock. I know I got a sound scolding for the state of his pulse (which the third mate seemed to understand, as he understood most things), and was dismissed with some pithy hints about cultivating common sense and not making a fool of myself. I sneaked off, and was thankful to meet Alister and pour out my tale to him, and ask if he thought that our new friend would have brain-fever, because I had let him talk about his shipwreck.

Alister was not quite so sympathetic as I had expected. He was so much shocked about the crucifix and about Dennis praying for Barney's soul, that he could think of nothing else. He didn't seem to think that he would have fever, but he said he feared we had small reason to reckon on the prayers of the idolatrous ascending to the throne of grace. He told me a long story about the Protestant martyrs who were shut up in a dungeon under the sea, on the coast of Aberdeenshire, and it would have been very interesting if I hadn't been thinking of Dennis.

We had turned in for some sleep, and I was rolling myself in my blanket, when Alister called me: "Jack! did ye ever read Fox's 'Book of Martyrs'?"

"No."

"It's a gran' work, and it has some awful tales in it. When we've a bit of holiday leasure I'll tell ye some."

"Thank you, Alister."

CHAPTER XX.

"A very wise man believed that, if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."—*Fletcher of Saltoun in a letter to the Marquis of Montrose.*

THE weather was fair enough, and we went along very steadily and pleasantly that afternoon. I was undoubtedly getting my sea-legs, which was well for me, as they were put to the test unexpectedly. I happened to be standing near Alistair (we were tarring ropes), when some orders rang out in Mr. Waters' voice, which I found had reference to something to be done to some of the sails. At last came the words "Away aloft!" which were responded to by a rush of several sailors, who ran and leaped and caught ropes and began climbing the rigging with a nimbleness and dexterity which my own small powers in that line enabled me to appreciate, as I gazed upwards after them. The next order bore unexpected and far from flattering references to me.

"Hi, there. Francis!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Take that gaping booby up with you. I hear he's 'good at athletics.'"

The sailors who were rope-tarring sniggered audibly, and Alistair lifted his face with a look of anxiety, that did as much as the sniggering to stimulate me not to disgrace myself.

"Kick off your shoes, and come along," said Francis. "Jump on the bulwarks and then follow me. Look aloft—that's up, ye know—never mind your feet, but keep tight hold of the ratlins—so, with your hands, and when you *are* up aloft, don't let one hand go till you're sure of your hold with the other."

Up we went, gripping the swaying ropes with toes and fingers, till we reached the maintop, where I was allowed to creep through the "Lubber's Hole," and Francis swung himself neatly over the outside edge of the top, and there he and I stood for a few moments to rest.

I cannot say I derived much comfort from his favourable comments on my first attempt. I was painfully absorbed by realizing that to climb what is steady, and to climb what is swaying with every wave, are quite different things. Then, in spite of warnings, I was fascinated by the desire to look down; and when I looked I felt more uncomfortable than ever; the ship's deck was like a dancing teatray far below; my legs and arms began to feel very light, and my head heavy, and I did not hear what Francis was saying to me, so he pinched my arm and then repeated it.

"Come along—and if the other chaps put any larks on you, keep your eyes open, and never lose a grip by one hand somewhere. So long as you hold on to some of the ship's ropes you're bound to find your way back somehow."

"I'll try," I said.

Then through the confusion in my head I heard a screaming whistle, and a voice from beneath, and Francis pricked his ears, and then suddenly swung himself back on to the ladder of ropes by which we had climbed.

"Lucky for you, young shaver," said he. "Come along!"

I desired no more definite explanation. Francis was going down, and I willingly did the same, but when my foot touched the deck I staggered and fell. It was Mr. Johnson who picked me up by the neck of my slops, saying, as he did so, "Boatswain! The Captain will give an extra lot of grog to drink Mr. O'Moore's good health."

This announcement was received with a cheer, and I heard the boatswain calling to "stow your cleaning-tackle, my lads, and for'ards to the break of the foc'sle. Them that has white ties and kid gloves can wear 'em; and them that's hout of sech articles must come as they can. Pick up that tar-pot, ye fool! Now are ye all coming and bringing your voices along with ye? Hany gentleman as 'as 'ad the misfortin' to leave his music behind, will oblige the ship's company with an ex-tem-por."

"Long life to ye, bo'sun; it's a neat hand at a speech ye are, upon my conscience!" cried Dennis, over my shoulder, and then his arm was around it, shaking with laughter, as we were hurried along by the eager crowd.

"He's a wag, that old fellow, too. Come along, little Jack! You're mighty shaky on your feet, considering the festivities that we're bound for. Step it out, my boy, or I'll have to carry ye."

"Are *you* coming to the foc'sle?" said I, being well aware that this was equivalent to a drawing-room visitor taking tea in the kitchen. "You know it's where the common sailors, and Alistair and I have our meals?" I added, for his private ear.

"Thank ye for the hint. I know it's where I hope to meet the men that offered their lives for mine."

"That's true, Dennis, I know; but don't be cross. They'll be awfully pleased to see you."

"And not without reason, I can tell ye! Didn't I beard the lion in his den, the Captain in his cabin, to beg for the grog? And talking of beards, of all the fiery—, upon my soul he's not safe to be near gunpowder. Jack, is he Scotch?"



"Jump on the bulwarks, and then follow me." P. 80.

"Yes."

"They're bad to blarney, and I did my best, I can tell you, for my own sake as well as for the men. I'm as shy with strangers as an owl by daylight, and I'll never get a thank ye out of my throat, unless we've the chance of a bit of sociability. However, at last he called to that nice fellow—third mate, isn't he?—and gave orders for

the rum. 'Two water grog, Mr. Johnson,' says he. 'Ah, Captain,' I said, 'don't be throwing cold water on the entertainment; they got their share of that last night. It's only the rum that's required to complete us now.' But he's as deaf to fun as he is to blarney. Is he good to you, little stowaway?"

"Oh, very," said I. "And you should hear

what the men tell about other captains. They all like this one."

"He has an air of uprightness about him; and so has that brother-in-adversity of yours, more polish to him! He must be a noble fellow, though. I can't get over *his* volunteering, without the most distant obligation to risk his life for me—not even a sailor. And yet he won't be friendly, do what I will. As formal as you please—that's pride, I suppose—he's Scotch too, isn't he? Blarney's no go with him. Faith, it's like trying to butter short-bread with the thermometer at zero. By Jove, there he is ahead of us. Alister, man! Not the ghost of a look will he give me. He's fine-looking, too, if his hair wasn't so insanely distracted, and his brow ridged and furrowed deep enough to plant potatoes in. What in the name of fortune's he doing to his hands?"

"He's *washing* them with a lump of grease," said I. "I saw Francis give it him. It's to get the tar off."

"That indeed? Alister! *Alister!* Have ye no eyes in the back of ye? Here's Jack and myself."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Alister, stiffly.

"Oh, confound your *sir*-liness!" muttered Dennis, and added aloud, "Is that pomatum for your hair?"

Alister laughed in spite of himself.

"More like hair-*dye*, sir," said he, and rubbing desperately at his fingers, he added, "I can't get them decent."

"Ah, let them rest!" said Dennis. "It's painting the lily to adorn them. On ye go; and mind ye keep near to us, and we'll make a land-lubber's parliament in a corner to ourselves."

My first friend had thawed, and went cheerfully ahead of us, as I was very glad to see. Dennis saw it too, but only to relapse into mischief. He held me back, as Alister strode in front, and putting out his thumb and finger, so close to a tuft of hay-coloured hair that stood cocked defiantly up on the Scotchman's crown that I was in all the agony he meant me to be for fear of detection; he chattered in my ear, "Jack, did ye ever study physiognomy, or any of the science of externals? Look at this independent tuft. Isn't the whole character of the man in it? Could mortal man force it down? Could the fingers of woman coax it? Would ye appeal to it with argument? Would hair's grease, bear's grease——"

But his peroration was suddenly cut short by a rush from behind, one man tumbling over another on the road to the fore-castle. Dennis himself was thrown against Alister, and his hand came heavily down on the stubborn lock of hair.

"It's these fellows, bad manners to them," he explained; but I think Alister suspected a joke at

his expense, and putting his arms suddenly behind him, he seized Dennis by the legs and hoisted him on to his back as if he had been a child. In this fashion the hero of the occasion was carried to a place of honour, and deposited (not too gently) on the top of an inverted deck-tub, amid the cheers and laughter of all concerned.

Round another tub—a shallow oak one, tidily hooped with copper—which served as spittoon, a solemn circle of smokers was already assembled. They disturbed themselves to salute Dennis, and to make room for others to join them, and then the enlarged circle puffed and kept silence as before. I was watching the colour come and go on the Irish boy's face, and he was making conical signs to me to show his embarrassment, when Mr. Johnson shouted for the grog-tub to be sent aft, and the boatswain summoned me to get it and follow him.

The smokers were not more silent than we, as the third mate slowly measured the rum—half a gill a head—into the grog-tub. But when this solemnity was over and he began to add the water, a very spirited dialogue ensued; Mr. Johnson (so far as I could understand it) maintaining that "two-water grog" was the rule of the ships on their line, and the boatswain pleading that this being a "special issue" was apart from general rules, and that it would be more complimentary to the "young gentleman" to have the grog a little stronger. How it ended I do not know; I know I thought my "tot" very nasty, and not improved by the reek of strong tobacco in the midst of which we drank it, to Dennis O'Moore's very good health.

When the boatswain and I got back to the fore-castle, carrying the grog-tub, we found the company as we had left it, except that there was a peculiarly bland expression on every man's face as he listened to a song that the cook was singing. It was a very lovelorn, lamentable, and lengthy song, three qualities which alone would recommend it to any audience of Jack Tars, as I have since had many occasions to observe. The intense dolefulness of the ditty was not diminished by the fact that the cook had no musical ear, and having started on a note that was no note in particular, he flattened with every long-drawn lamentation till the ballad became more of a groan than a song. When the grog-tub was deposited, Dennis beckoned to the boatswain, and we made our way to his side.

"Your cook's a vocal genius, anyhow, bo'sun," said he. "But don't ye think we'd do more justice to our accomplishments, and *keep in tune*, if we'd an accompaniment? Have ye such a thing as a fiddle about ye?"

The boatswain was delighted. Of course there was a fiddle, and I was dispatched for it. I should find it hanging on a hook at the end of the plate-rack, and if the bow was not beside it it would be upon the shelf, and there used to be a lump of resin and a spare string or two in an empty division of the spice-box. The whole kit had belonged to a former cook, a very musical nigger, who had died at sea, and bequeathed his violin to his ship. Sambo had been well liked, and there were some old hands would be well pleased to hear his fiddle once more.

It took me some little time to find everything, and when I got back to Dennis another song had begun. A young sailor I did not know was singing it, and the less said about it the better, except that it very nearly led to a row. It was by way of being a comic song, but except for one line which was rather witty as well as very nasty, there was nothing humorous about it, unless that it was funny that any one could have been indecent enough to write it, and any one else unblushing enough to sing it. I am ashamed to say I had heard some compositions of a similar type at Snuffy's, and it filled me with no particular amazement to hear a good deal of sniggering in the circle round the spittoon, though I felt miserably uncomfortable, and wondered what Mr. O'Moore would think. I had forgotten Alistair.

I was not likely soon to forget his face as I saw it, the blood swelling his forehead, and the white wrath round his lips, when he gripped me by the shoulder, saying, in broader Scotch than usual, "Come awa' wi' ye, laddie! I'll no let ye stay. Come awa' oot of this accurst hole. I wonder he doesna think black burning shame of himself" to stand up before greyheaded men and fill a callant's ears with filth like yon."

Happily just indignation had choked Alistair's voice as well as his veins, and I don't think many of the company heard this too accurate summary of the situation. The boatswain did, but before he could speak, Dennis O'Moore had sprung to the ground between them, and laying the fiddle over his shoulder played a wild sort of jig that most effectually and unceremoniously drowned the rest of the song, and diverted the attention of the men.

"The fiddle's an old friend, so the bo'sun tells me," he said, nodding towards the faces that turned to him.

"Aye, aye, sir,"

"Why, I'm blessed if it isn't Sambo's old thing."

"It's your honour knows how to bring the heart out of it, anyhow,"

"My eyes, Pat! You should ha' heerd it at

the dignity ball we went ashore for at Barbadoes. Did you ever foot the floor with a black washer-woman of eighteen stun, dressed out in muslin the colour o' orange marmalade, and white kid shoes?"

"I did not, the darlin'!"

As the circle gossiped, Dennis tuned the fiddle, talking vehemently to the boatswain between whiles.

"Bo'sun! I ye're not to say a word to the boy (sit down, Alistair, I tell ye!). I ask it as a favour. He didn't mince matters, I'll allow, but it was God's truth, and no less that he spoke. Come, bo'sun, who's a better judge of manners than yourself? We'd had enough and to spare of that. (Will ye keep quiet, ye cantankerous Scotchman! Who's harming ye now? Jack, if ye move an inch, I'll break this fiddle over your head.) Bo'sun! we're perishing for our grog, are ye aware?"

The diversion was successful. The boatswain, with a few indignant mutterings, devoted himself to doling out the tots of grog, and then proposed Dennis O'Moore's health in a speech full of his own style of humour, which raised loud applause; Dennis commenting freely on the text, and filling up awkward pauses with flourishes on Sambo's fiddle. The boatswain's final suggestion that the ship's guest should return thanks by a song, instead of a sentiment, was received with acclamations, during which he sat down, after casting a mischievous glance at Dennis, who was once more blushing and fidgeting with shyness.

"Ye've taken your revenge, bo'sun," said he.

"Them that blames should do better, sir," replied the boatswain, folding his arms.

"A song! A song! Mr. O'Moore!" shouted the men.

"I only know a few old Irish songs," pleaded Dennis.

"Ould Ireland for ever!" cried Pat Shaughnessy.

"Hear! hear! Encore, Pat!" roared the men. They were still laughing. Then one or two of those nearest to us put up their hands to get silence. Sambo's fiddle was singing (as only voices and fiddles can sing) a melody to which the heads and toes of the company soon began to nod and beat—

"La, lā lā la la, la la la, lā lā la, lā
La, le la la la, la la la, lā—lā la lā,"

hummed the boatswain. "Lor' bless me, Mr. O'Moore, I heard that afore you were born, though I'm blessed if I know where. But it's a genteel pretty thing!"

"It's all about roses and nightingales!" shouted Dennis, with comical grimaces.

"Hear! hear!" answered the oldest and hairiest-looking of the sailors, and the echoes of his appro-

bation only died away to let the song begin. Then the notes of Sambo's fiddle also dropped off, and I heard Dennis O'Moore's beautiful voice for the first time as he gave his head one desperate toss and began :

"There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,
And the nightingale sings round it all the night long.
In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet dream
To sit in the roses and hear the bird's song."

One by one the pipes were rested on the smoker's knees ; they wanted their mouths to hear with. I don't think the assembled company can have looked much like exiles from flowery haunts of the nightingale, but we all shook our heads, not only in time but in sympathy, as the clear voice rose to a more passionate strain :

"That bower and its music I never forget ;
But oft when alone in the bloom of the year,
I think—is the nightingale singing there?
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendemeer?"

I and the oldest and hairiest sailor were sighing like furnaces as the melody recommenced with the second verse :

"No, the roses soon withered that hung o'er the wave,
But some blossoms were gathered while freshly they shone,
And a dew was distilled from their flowers, that gave
All the fragrance of summer when summer was gone."

If making pot-pourri after my mother's old family recipe had been the chief duty of able-bodied seamen, this could not have elicited more nods of approbation. But we listened spell-bound and immoveable to the passion and pathos with which the singer poured forth the conclusion of his song :

"Thus memory draws from delight, ere it dies,
An essence that breathes of it many a year ;
Thus bright to my soul—as 'twas then to my eyes—
Is that bower on the banks of the calm Bendemeer."

And then (as somebody said) the noise we made was enough to scare the seagulls off the tops of the waves.

"You scored that time, Mr. O'Moore," said the boatswain. "You'd make your fortune in a music-hall, sir."

"Thank ye, bo'sun. Glad I didn't give ye your revenge, anyhow."

But the boatswain meant to strike nearer home. A ship's favourite might have hesitated to sing after Dennis, so Alister's feelings may be guessed on hearing the following speech :

"Mr. O'Moore, and comrades all. I believe I speak for all hands on this vessel, when I say that we ain't likely to forget sech an agreeable addition to a ship's company as the gentleman who has just given us a taste of the nightingale's quality" (loud cheers). "But we've been out-o'-way favoured as I may say, this voyage. We musn't forget that

there's two other little strangers aboard" (roars of laughter). "They 'olds their 'eads rather 'igh p'raps, for *stowaways*" ("Hear! hear!"), "but no doubt their talents bears 'em out" ("Hear, hear!" from Dennis, which found a few friendly echoes). "Anyway, as they've paid us a visit, without waiting to ask if we was at 'ome to callers, we may look to 'em to contribute to the general entertainment. Alister Auchterlay will now favour the company with a song."

The boatswain stood back and folded his arms, and fixed his eyes on the sea-line, from which attitude no appeals could move him. I was very sorry for Alister, and so was Dennis, I am sure, for he did his best to encourage him.

"Sing 'GOD save the Queen,' and I'll keep well after ye with the fiddle," he suggested. But Alister shook his head. "I know one or two Scotch tunes," Dennis added, and he began to sketch out an air or two with his fingers on the strings.

Presently Alister stopped him. "Yon's the 'Land o' the Leal?'"

"It is," said Dennis.

"Play it a bit quicker, man, and I'll try 'Scots wha hae.'"

Dennis quickened at once, and Alister stood forward. He neither fidgeted nor complained of feeling shy, but as my eyes (I was squatted cross-legged on the deck) were at the level of his knees, I could see them shaking, and pitied him none the less, that I was doubtful as to what might not be before *me*. Dennis had to make two or three false starts before poor Alister could get a note out of his throat, but when he had fairly broken the ice with the word "Scots!" he faltered no more.

The boatswain was cheated a second time of his malice. Alister could not sing in the least like Dennis, but he had a strong manly voice, and it had a ring that stirred one's blood, as he clenched his hands, and rolled his Rs to the rugged appeal :

"Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has often led ;
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!"

Applause didn't seem to steady his legs in the least, and he never moved his eyes from the sea, and his face only grew whiter by the time he drove all the blood to my heart with—

"Wha will be a traitor knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Let him turn and flee!"

"God forbid!" cried Dennis impetuously. "Sing that verse again, me boy, and give us a chance to sing with ye!" which we did accordingly ; but as Alister and Dennis were rolling Rs

like the rattle of musketry on the word *turn*, Alister did turn, and stopped suddenly short. The Captain had come up unobserved.

"Go on!" said he, waving us back to our places.

By this time the solo had become a chorus. Beautifully unconscious, for the most part, that the song was by way of stirring Scot against Saxon, its deeper patriotism had seized upon us all. Englishmen, Scotchmen, and sons of Erin, we all shouted at the top of our voices, Sambo's fiddle not being silent. And I maintain that we all felt the sentiment with our whole hearts, though I doubt if any but Alister and the Captain knew and sang the precise words:

"Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or freeman fa'
Let him on wi' me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"'Tis strange—but true; for truth is always strange—
Stranger than fiction."

Byron.

"Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows."
Gray.

THE least agreeable part of our voyage came near the end. It was when we were in the fog off the coast of Newfoundland. The work that tired one to death was not sufficient to keep one warm; the cold mist seemed to soak through one's flesh as well as one's slops, and to cling to one's bones as it clung to the ship's gear. The deck was slippery and cold, everything, except the funnel, was sticky and cold, and the foghorn made day and night hideous with noises like some unmusical giant trying in vain to hit the note Fa. The density of the fog varied. Sometimes we could not see each other a few feet off, at others we could see pretty well what we were about on the vessel, but could see nothing beyond.

We went very slowly, and the fog lasted unusually long. It included a Sunday, which is a blessed day to Jack at sea. No tarring, greasing, oiling, painting, scraping or scrubbing but what is positively necessary, and no yarn-spinning but that of telling travellers' tales, which seamen aptly describe as spinning yarns. I heard a great many that day which recalled the schoolmaster's stories, and filled my head and heart with indefinite longings and impatience. More and more did it seem impossible that one could live content in one little corner of this interesting world when one has eyes to see

and ears to hear, and hands for work, and legs to run away with.

Not that the tales that were told on this occasion were of an encouraging nature, for they were all about fogs and ice; but they were very interesting. One man had made this very voyage in a ship that got out of her course as it might be where we were then. She was too far to the northward when a fog came on, as it might be the very fog we were in at that moment, and it lasted, lifting a bit and falling again worse than ever, just the very same as it was a-doing now. Cold? He believed you this fog was cold, and you might believe him that fog was cold, but the cold of both together would not be a patch upon what it was when your bones chattered in your skin and you heard the ship's keel grinding, and said "Ice!" "He'd seen some queer faces—dead and living—in his time, but when *that* fog lifted and the sun shone upon walls of green ice on both sides above our head, and the Captain's face as cold and as green as them with knowing all was up——"

At this point the narrator was called away, and somebody asked,

"Has any one heard him tell how it ended?"

"I did," said Pat Shaughnessy, "and it spoilt me dinner that time."

"Go on, Pat! What happened to them?"

"The lowest depths of misfortune. Sorra a soul but himself and a boy escaped by climbing to a ledge on the topmost peak of one of the icebergs just in the nick of time to see the ship cracked like a walnut between your fingers. And the worst was to come, bad luck!"

"What? Go on, Paddy! What did he and the boy do?"

"They just eat each other," faltered Pat. "But, Heaven be praised! a whaler fetched off the survivor. It was then that he got the bad fever though, so maybe he dreamt the worst."

I felt great sympathy with Pat's evident disrelish for this tale, but the oldest and hairiest sailor seemed hardly to regard it as worth calling an adventure. If you wanted to see ice that was ice, you should try the coast of Greenland, he said.

"Hartic Hexploration for choice, but seals or blubber took you pretty far up. He remembered the Christmas he lost *them* two. (And cocking one leg over the other, he drew a worsted sock from his foot, and displayed the fact that his great toe and the one next to it were gone.) They lost more than toes that time too. You might believe it gave you a lonelyish kind of feel when there was no more to be done for the ship but get as much firewood out of her timber as you could, and all you had in the way of a home was huts on an ice-floe, and a white fox, with a black tip to its tail,

for a pet. It wouldn't have lasted long, except for discipline," we young 'uns might take notice. "Pleasure's all very well ashore, where a man may go his own way a long time, and show his nasty temper at home, and there's other folks about him doing double duty to make up for it and keep things together; but when you come to a handful of men cast adrift to make a world for themselves, as one may say, Lord bless you! there's nothing's any good then but making every man do as he's bid and be content with what he gets—and clearing him out if he won't. It was a hard winter at that. But regularity pulled us through. Reg'lar work, reg'lar ways, reg'lar rations and reg'lar lime-juce, as long as it lasted. And not half a bad Christmas we didn't have neither, and poor Sal's Christmas-tree, was the best part of it. 'What sort of a Christmas-tree, and why Sal's?' Well, the carpenter put it up, and an uncommon neat thing he made too, of pinewood and birch-broom, and some of the men hung it over with paper chains. And then the carpenter opened the bundle Sal made him take his oath he wouldn't open till Christmas, whatever came, and I'm blest if there wasn't a pair of brand-new socks for every soul of the ship's crew. Not that we were so badly off for socks, but washing 'em reg'lar, and never being able able to get 'em really dry, and putting 'em on again like stones, was a mighty different thing to getting all our feet into something dry and warm. 'Who was Sal?' Well, poor Sal was a rum 'un, but she's dead. It's a queer thing, we only lost one hand, and that was the carpenter, and he died the same day poor Sal was murdered down Bermondsey way. It's a queer world, this, no matter where you're cruising! But there's one thing you'll learn if you live as long as me; a woman's heart and the ocean deep's much about the same. You can't reckon on 'em, and GOD A'mighty as made 'em, alone knows the depths of 'em; but as our doctor used to say (and he was always fetching things out and putting 'em into bottles), it's the rough weather brings the best of it up."

This was not a cheerful story, but it was soon driven out of our heads by others. Fog was the prevailing topic; yarns of the fogs of the northern seas being varied by "red fogs" off the Cape de Verd Islands; and not the least dismal of the narratives was told by Alister Auchterlay, of a fog on Ben Nevis, in which his own grandmother's uncle perished, chiefly, as it appeared, in consequence of a constitutional objection to taking advice, or to "going back upon his word," when he had made up his mind to do something or to go somewhere. And this drew from the boatswain the sad fate of a comrade of his, who had sailed twice round the world, been shipwrecked four times, in

three collisions, and twice aboard ships that took fire, had Yellow Jack in the West Indies, and sunstroke at the Cape, lost a middle finger from frost-bite in the north of China, and one eye in a bit of a row at San Francisco, and came safe home after it all, and married a snug widow in a pork-shop at Wapping Old Stairs, and got out of his course steering home through a London fog on Guy Fawkes Day, and walked straight into the river, and was found at low tide next morning with a quid of tobacco in his cheek, and nothing missing about him but his glass eye, which shows, as the boatswain said, that "Fogs is fogs anywhere, and a nasty thing too."

It was towards dark when we had been fourteen days at sea, that our own fog suddenly lifted, and the good news flew from mouth to mouth that we might be "in about midnight." But the fog came down again, and I do not think that the whole fourteen days put together felt so long as the hours of that one night through which the fog-horn blew, and we longed for day.

I was leaning against the bulwarks at eight o'clock the next morning. White mist was all around us, a sea with no horizon. Suddenly, like the curtain of a theatre, the mist rose. Gradually the horizon-line appeared, then a line of low coast, which, muddy-looking as it was, made one's heart beat thick and fast. Then lines of dark wood; then the shore was dotted with grey huts; then the sun came out, the breeze was soft and mild, and the air became strangely scented, and redolent of pine forests. Nearer the coast took more shape, though it was still low, rather bare and dotted with brushwood and grey stones low down, and always crowned with pines. Then habitations began to sparkle along the shore. Red roofs, cardboard-looking churches, little white wooden houses, and stiffish trees mixed everywhere. And the pine odour on the breeze was sweeter and sweeter with every breath one drew.

Suddenly I found Alister's arm round my shoulder.

"Isn't it glorious?" I exclaimed.

"Aye, aye," he said, and then, as if afraid he had not said enough, he added with an effort: "The toun's built almost entirely of wood, I'm told, with a population of close on 30,000 inhabitants."

"What a fellow you are!" I groaned: "Alister, aren't you glad we're safe here? Are you ever pleased about anything?"

He didn't speak, and I turned in his arm to look up at his face. His eyes, which always remind me of the sea, were looking away over it, but he brought them back to meet mine, and pressed my shoulder.

"It is bonnie," he said, "verra bonnie. But eh, man! If strange land shines like yon, hoo'll oor ain shores look whenever we win Home?"

CHAPTER XXII.

"One, two, three, and away!"

WE three were fast friends when our voyage ended, and in planning our future we planned to stick together, "Like the three leaves of the shamrock," as Dennis O'Moore said.

The Captain would have kept Alister as one of his crew, but the Scotch lad had definite plans for looking up a cousin on this side of the Atlantic, and pushing his fortunes by the help of his relative, so he did not care to make the return voyage. The Captain did not offer the berth to me, but he was very kind, and returned my money, and gave us a written paper testifying to our good conduct and capabilities. He also gave Alister his address, and he and the other officers collected a small sum of money for him as a parting gift.

That afternoon we three crossed the harbour, and went for a walk in the pinewoods. How I longed for Charlie! I would have given anything if he could have been there, warmed through by the hot sun, refreshed by the smell of pines, resting his poor back in the deep moss, and getting excited over the strange flowers that grew wild all round our feet. One never forgets the first time one sees unknown flowers growing wild; and though we were not botanical, like Charlie, we had made ourselves very hot with gathering nose-gays by the time that Dennis summoned us to sit down and talk seriously over our affairs. Our place of council was by the side of a lake, which reflected a sky more blue than I had ever seen. It stretched out of sight, and all about it were pines—pines. It was very lovely, and very hot, and very sweet, and the little black flies which swarmed about took tiny bits out of our cheek, and left the blood trickling down, so cleverly, that one did not feel it—till afterwards. We did feel the mosquitos, and fought with them as well as we could, whilst Dennis O'Moore, defending his own face with a big bunch of jack-in-pulpits striped like tabby cats, explained his plans as follows:—

Of course we had no notion of going home awhile. Alister and I had come away on purpose; and for his own part it had always been the longing of his soul to see the world. Times out of mind when he and Barney were on board one of these emigrant ships, that had put into the bay, GOD-speeding an old tenant or acquaintance with

good wishes and whiskey and what not, he had been more than half inclined to give old Barney and the hooker the slip, and take his luck with the outward bound. And now he was here, and no blame for it, why would he hurry home? The race of the O'Moore's was not likely to become extinct for the loss of him, at the worst; and the Squire wouldn't grudge him a few months' diversion and a peep at the wide world. Far from it; he'd send him some money, and why not? He (Dennis) was a bit of a favourite for his mother's sake, and the Squire had a fine heart. The real difficulty was that it would be at least a month before the Squire could get a letter and Dennis could get his money; but if we couldn't keep our heads above water for a month we'd small chance of pushing our way in the world.

It is needless to say that I was willing to fall in with Dennis O'Moore's plans, being only too thankful for such companions in my wanderings. I said so, and added that what little money I had was to be regarded as a common purse so long as it lasted.

When Alister was appealed to, he cast in his lot with no less willingness, but it seemed that he must first look up a relation of his mother's, who lived in Halifax, and to whom his mother had given him a letter of introduction. Alister had never told us his history, and of course we had not asked for it; but on this occasion some of it crept out. His father had been the minister of a country parish in Scotland, but he had died young, and Alister had been reared in poverty. Dennis and I gathered that he had well-to-do relatives on his father's side, but, as Dennis said, "more kinship than kindness about them." "Though I wouldn't wonder if the widow herself had a touch of stiff-neckedness in her," he added.

However that might be, Alister held with his mother, of course, and he said little enough about his paternal relations, except one, whom he described as "a gude man, and *verra* canny, but hard on the failings of the young." What youthful failings in our comrade had helped to snap the ties of home, we did not know, but we knew enough of Alister by this time to feel sure they could not have been very unpardonable.

It was not difficult to see that it was under the sting of this man's reproaches that the lad had taken his fate into his own hands.

"I'm not blaming him," said Alister in impartial tones; and then he added, with a flash of his eyes, but "I'll no be indebted to him!"

We had returned to the town, and were strolling up the shady side of one of the clean wooden streets, when a strange figure came down it with a swinging gait, at a leisurely pace. She (for,

after a moment's hesitation, we decided that it was a woman) was of gipsy colouring, but not of gipsy beauty. Her black hair was in a loose knot on her back, she wore a curious skull cap of black cloth embroidered with beads, a short cloth skirt, a pair of old trousers tucked into leather socks, a small blanket with striped ends folded cunningly over her shoulders, and on her breast a gold cross about twice as large as the one concealed beneath the Irish boy's shirt. And I looked at her with a curious feeling that my dreams were coming true. Dark—high-cheeked—a blanket—and (unless the eyes with which I gazed almost reverentially at the dirty leather socks deceived me) moccasins—she was, she must be, a *squaw*!

Probably Dennis had come to the same conclusion, when, waving the tabby-coloured *arums*, he said, "I'll ask her what these are," and gaily advanced to carry out his purpose.

"Ye're daft," said Alister, getting red.

"It's a North American Indian!" said I.

"It's a woman, anyhow!" retorted Dennis over his shoulder, with a twinkle of his eyelashes that drew from Alister in his broadest accent, "The lad's a pairfrect libberteen!" an expression which he afterwards retracted and apologized for at considerable length.

Within a few feet of the squaw Dennis lifted the broad-brimmed hat which I had bought for him directly we landed, and then advancing with a winning smile, he asked the name of the flowers in very good Irish. The squaw smiled too; she touched the flowers, and nodded and said something in a soft, rapid and unknown tongue, which only made Dennis shake his head and smile again, on which she spoke in a language still dark to Alister and me, but not so to Dennis, who, to our amazement, replied in the same, and a dialogue so spirited ensued, that they both seemed to be talking at once. Alister's face was a study when Dennis put out his hand towards the squaw's gold cross, and all but touched it, and then (both chattering faster than ever) unbuttoned his throat and drew out his crucifix to show her. His last act was to give her half the tabby-striped *arums* as they parted. Then he lifted the broad hat once more and stood bareheaded, as the squaw came slowly down the wooden causeway, not without one glance at us as she passed. But at the bottom of the street she turned round to look at Dennis. His hat was still in his hand, and he swung it round his head, crying, "A Dieu, Madame!"

"A Dieu!" said the squaw, and she held up the tabby-striped *arums*. Very mingled feelings seemed to have been working in Alister's mind, but his respect for the fruits of education was stronger even than his sense of propriety. He

forgot to scold Dennis for his unseemly familiarity with a stranger, he was so anxious to know in what language he had been speaking,

"French," said Dennis. "There seems to be a French mission somewhere near here. She's a good Catholic too, but she has a mighty queer accent, and awful feet!"

"It's a grand thing to speak with other tongues!" said Alister.

"If ye want to learn French, I'll teach ye all I can," said Dennis. "Sh—sh! No kindness whatever. I wish we mayn't have idle time for any amount of philology!"

At the top of the hill we parted for a time, and went our ways. Alister to look up his relation, I to buy stationery and stamps for our letters home, and Dennis to convert his gold ring into the currency of the colony. We would not let him pawn his watch, which he was most anxious to do, though Alister and I pointed out how invaluable it might prove to us (it was a good hunting-watch, and had been little damaged by the sea), because, as he said, "he would feel as if he was doing something, anyhow."

Alister and I were the last to part, and as we did so, having been talking about Dennis O'Moore, I said, "I knew it was French when I got nearer, but I never learnt French, though my mother began to teach me once. You don't really think you'll learn it from him, do you?"

"With perseverance," replied Alister, simply.

"What good will French be to you?" I asked.

"Knowledge is a light burden, and it may carry ye yet," was Alister's reply.

When we met again, Dennis was jingling some money in his pocket, which was added to the common fund of which the miser's legacy had formed the base. I had got paper and stamps, and information as to mails, and some more information which was postponed till we found out what was amiss with the Scotch leaf of our Shamrock. For there were deep furrows on Alister's brow, but far deeper was the despondency of his soul. He was in the lowest possible spirits, and with a Scotchman that is low indeed. He had made out his way to his cousin's place of business, and had heard a very satisfactory report of the commercial success, but—the cousin had gone "to the States."

Alister felt himself very much ill-used by fate, and I believe Dennis felt himself very much ill-used by Alister, that evening, but I maintain that I alone was the person really to be pitied, because I had to keep matters smooth between the two. The gloom into which Alister relapsed, his prophecies, prognostications, warnings, raven-like croakings, parallel instances, general reflections

and personal applications, as well as his obstinate notion that he would be "a burden and a curse" to "the two of us," and that it would have been small wonder had the sailors cast him forth into the Atlantic, like the Prophet Jonah, as being certain to draw ill-luck on his companions, were trying enough; but it was no joke that misfortune had precisely the opposite effect upon Dennis. If there was a bit of chaff left unchaffed in all Ireland, from Malin Head to Barley Cove, I believe it came into Dennis's head on this inappropriate occasion, and he forthwith discharged it at Alister's. To put some natures into a desperate situation seems like putting tartaric acid into soda and water—they sparkle up and froth. It certainly was so with Dennis O'Moore; and if Alister could hardly have been more raven-like upon the crack of doom, the levity of Dennis would, in our present circumstances, have been discreditable to a paroquet.

For it was no light matter to have lost our one hope of a friend in this strange land; and yet this was practically what it meant, when we knew that Alister Auchterlay's cousin had gone to the States. But the idea of kinship at last suggested something more sensible than jokes to Dennis O'Moore.

"Why, I've a cousin of my own in Demerara, and I'd forgotten him entirely!" he suddenly announced.

"You haven't a cousin in New York, have you?" I asked, and I proceeded to explain, that having done my business, I had been drawn back to the harbour by all the attractions shipping has for me, and had there been accosted by the mate of a coasting-vessel bound for New York with salt fish, who was in want of hands both to load and man her. The "Water-Lily" had been pointed out to me from a distance, and we might go and see her to-morrow morning if we liked. With the prospect of living for at least a month on our slender stocking, the idea of immediate employment was very welcome, to say nothing of the attraction of further adventures. Alister began to cheer up, and Dennis to sober down. We wrote home, and posted our letters, after which we secured a decent sleeping-room and a good meal of broiled salmon, saffron-coloured cakes, and hot coffee, for a very reasonable sum; but, moderate as it was, it confirmed us in the conviction that we could not afford to eat the bread of idleness.

Next day we were early at the wharf. The "Water-Lily" was by no means so white as she was named, and the smell of the salt fish was abominable. But we knew we could not pick and choose when we wanted employment, and wanted to be together; and to this latter point we had nailed our colours. With Alister and me the mate

came to terms at once, but for a time he made difficulties about Dennis. We "stowaways" had had so much dirty work to do in all weathers for the past fortnight, that we looked sailor-like enough, I dare say; and as it had honestly been our endeavour to learn all we could, and shirk nothing, and as the Captain's paper spoke well of us, I think the mate got a very good bargain—for we were green enough to take lower wages than the customary rate on the strength of a long string of special reasons which he made us swallow. This probably helped towards his giving in about Dennis. The matter about Dennis was that he looked too much of the fine gentleman still, though his homespun suit had seen salt water, and was far from innocent of tar and grease, for he had turned his hand to plenty of rough work during the voyage, partly out of good-nature, and partly to learn all he could get the sailors to teach him. However, his coaxing tongue clinched the bargain at last; indeed the mate seemed a good deal struck by the idea that he would find it "mighty convenient" to have a man on board who was a good scholar and could help him to keep the log. So we signed articles, and went to our duty.

The "Water-Lily" was loaded, and we sailed in her, and we got to New York. But of all the ill-found tubs that ever put to sea, I should think she might have taken the first prize. We were overhauling her rotten rigging, taking off, putting on, and mending chafing gear every bit of our time, Sunday included. The carpenter used horrible language, but for his vexation I could have forgiven him if he had expressed it more decently, for he never had a moment's rest by day; and though a ship's carpenter is exempt from watches and allowed to sleep at night as a rule, I doubt if he had two nights' rest between Halifax and New York.

As Dennis put it, there was "any amount of chicanery about the whole affair." Some of our pay was "set against" supplying "duds" for Dennis to do dirty work in; Alister was employed as sailmaker, and then, like the carpenter, was cheated of his rest. As to food, we were nearly starved, and should have fared even worse than we did, but that the black cook was friendly towards us.

"Dis 'Water-Lily' ob ours a leetle ober-blown, Dennis, I'm tinkin'," said Alfonso, showing all his white teeth. "Hope she not fall to pieces dis voyage."

"Hope not, Alfonso. She hasn't lost her scent, anyhow!" At which allusion to our unsavoury cargo Alfonso yelled with laughter.

For our favour with the cook (and it means hot coffee, dry socks, and other little comforts being in

favour with the cook) we had chiefly to thank Dennis. Our coal-black comrade loved jokes much, but his own dignity just a little more; and the instinctive courtesy which was as natural to Dennis as the flow of his fun, made him particularly acceptable to Alfonso.

And for the rest, we came to feel that if we could keep the "Water-Lily" afloat to the end of her voyage, most other considerations were minor ones.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"May it please God not to make our friends so happy as to forget us!"—*Old Proverb.*

THE "Water-Lily" was re-christened by Dennis, with many flourishes of speech and a deck-tub of salt water long before we reached our journey's end. The "Slut," as we now privately called her, defied all our efforts to make her look creditable for New York Harbour, but we were glad enough to get her there at all.

We made the lights of Barnegat at about six o'clock one fine morning, took a pilot on board at Sandy Hook, and the "Slut" being by this time as ship-shape as we could get her, we cleaned ourselves to somewhat better purpose, put on our shore-togs, and were at leisure to enjoy one of the most charming sensations in the world, that of making one's way into a beautiful harbour on a beautiful morning. The fresh breeze that favoured us, the sunshine that—helped by the enchantment of distance—made warehouses look like public buildings, and stone houses like marble palaces, a softening hue of morning mist still clinging about the heights of Brooklyn and over the distant stretch of the Hudson River Islands, the sparkling waves and dancing craft in the bay, and all the dear familiar maze of spars and rigging in the docks; it is wonderful how such sights, and the knowledge that you are close to the haven where you would be, charm away the sore memories of the voyage past, and incline you to feel that it hasn't been such a bad cruise after all.

"Poor ole 'Water-Lily!'" sighed Alfonso, under the influence of this feeling, "you and me's called her a heap o' bad names, Dennis; I 'spects we has to have our grumbles, Dennis. Dat's 'bout whar 't is."

"She's weathered the storm and got into port, anyhow," said Dennis, "and I suppose you think the best can do no more. Eh?"

"Jes so, Dennis."

Alfonso was not far wrong on the subject of grumbling. It is one of a sailor's few luxuries

and privileges, and acts as safety-valve for heats of just and unjust indignation, which might otherwise come to dangerous explosion. We three had really learned no mean amount of rough-and-ready seamanship by this time, and we had certainly practised the art of grumbling as well. That "of all the dirty ill-found tubs," the "Slut" was the worst we had ever known, our limited experience had made us safe in declaring, and we had also been voluble about the undue length of time during which we had been "humbugging about" between Halifax and New York. But these by-gones we now willingly allowed to be by-gones, especially as we had had duff-putting the day before, though it was not Sunday—(Oh, Crayshaw's! that I should have lived to find duff-putting a treat—but it *is* a pleasant change from salt meat),—and as the captain had promised some repairs to the ship before we returned to Halifax.

We were not long in discovering that the promise was a safe one, for he did not mean to return to Halifax at all. Gradually it leaked out, that when the salt-fish was disposed of, we were not going to take in ballast and go back, as we had thought, but to stow away a "general cargo" of cheap manufactured articles (chiefly hardware, toys, trumpery pictures, and looking-glasses) and proceed with them on a trading voyage "down south."—"West Indies," said the carpenter. "Bermuda for certain," was another opinion; but Alfonso smiled and said "Demerara."

"Cap'n berry poor sailor, but berry good trader," he informed us in confidence. "Sell 'm stinking fish and buy gimcracks cheap; sell gimcracks dear to Portugee store in Georgetown, take in sugar—berry good sugar, Demerara sugar—and come back to New York."

Alfonso had made the voyage before on these principles, and was all the more willing to believe that this was to be the programme, because he was—at such uncertain intervals as his fate ordained—courting a young lady of colour in Georgetown, Demerara. I don't think Dennis O'Moore could help sympathising with people, and as a result of this good-natured weakness, he heard a great deal about that young lady of colour, and her genteel clothes, and how she played the piano, and belonged to the Baptist congregation.

"I've a cousin myself in Demerara, Alfonso," said Dennis.

"Hope she's kind to you, Dennis. Hope you can trust her, 'specially if the members walks home with her after meeting." And Alfonso sighed.

But jokes were far too precious on board the "Slut" for Dennis to spoil this one by explaining

that his cousin was a middle-aged gentleman in partnership with the owner of a sugar estate.

As we had sailed on the understanding that the "Water-Lily" was bound to New York and back again to Halifax, of course we made a fuss and protested at the change. But we had not really much practical choice in the matter, whatever our strict rights were, and on the whole we found it would be to our advantage to go through with it, especially as we did secure a better understanding about our wages, and the captain promised us more rest on Sundays. On one point we still felt anxious—our home letters; so Dennis wrote to the postmaster at Halifax, and arranged for them to be forwarded to us at the post-office, Georgetown, Demerara. For Alfonso was right, we were bound for British Guiana, it being however understood that we three were not under obligation to make the return voyage in the "Water-Lily."

An odd incident occurred during our brief stay in New York. It was after the interview in which we came to terms with the captain, and he had given us leave for three hours ashore. You can't see very much of a city when you have no money to spend in it; but we had walked about till we were very hungry, and yet more thirsty, for it was hot, when we all three caught sight of a small shop (or store, as Americans would call it), and we all spoke at once.

"Cooling drinks!" exclaimed Dennis.

"There's cakes yonder," said Alister.

"Michael Macartney," muttered I, for that was the name over the door.

We went in as a customer came out, followed by Michael Macartney's parting words in a rich brogue that might have been old Biddy's own. I took a good look at him, which he returned with a civil comment on the heat, and an inquiry as to what I would take, which Dennis, in the thinness of his throat, answered for me, leaving me a few moments more of observation. I made a mental calculation, and decided that the man's age would fit Mickey, and in the indescribability of the colour of his clothes and his complexion he was undoubtedly like Biddy, but if they had been born in different worlds the expression of his eyes could not have been more different. I had the clearest remembrance of hers. One does not so often look into the eyes of a stranger and see genuine feeling that one should forget it. For the rest of him, I was glad that Biddy had allowed that there was no similarity "betwixt us." He had a low forehead, a broad nose, a very wide mouth, full of very large teeth, and the humorous twinkle in his eye did not atone for the complete absence of that steady light of honest tenderness

which shone from Biddy's as freely and fearlessly as the sun shines. He served Dennis and Alister and turned to me.

"Have you a mother in Liverpool?" I asked, before he had time to ask me which "pop" I wanted.

As I have said, his mouth was big, but I was almost aghast at the size to which it opened, before he was able to say, "Murther and ages! Was ye there lately? Did ye know her?"

"Yes; I know her."

"And why would ye be standing there with the cold pop, when there's something better within? Come in, me boy. So you're acquainted with my mother? And how was she?"

"No, thank you, I don't drink spirits. Yes; your mother was well when I saw her."

"God be praised! It's a mighty long time since I seen the ould craythur."

"Fifteen years," said I.

I looked at Mr. Macartney as I said it, but he had evasive eyes, and they wandered to the doorway. No customers appeared, however, and he looked back to Dennis and Alister, but they had both folded their arms, and were watching us in silence.

"Murther and ages!" he repeated, "it doesn't feel the half of it."

"I fancy it seems longer, if anything, to her. But she has been on the look-out for you every day, you see. You've a good business, Mr. Macartney, so I dare say you're a ready reckoner. Fifteen times three hundred and sixty-five? Five thousand four hundred and seventy-five, isn't it?"

"It's a fine scholar for a sailor-boy that ye are!" said Mickey; and there was a touch of mischief in his eye and voice which showed that he was losing his temper. I suppose Dennis heard it, too, for he took one bound to my side in a way that almost made me laugh to feel how ready he was for a row. But I knew that, after all, I had no right over the man's private affairs, warm as was my zeal for old Biddy.

"And you think I might mind my business and leave you to yours, Mr. Macartney?" I said. "But you see your mother was very kind to me, very kind indeed; and when I left Liverpool I promised her if ever I came across you, you should hear of her, and she should hear of you."

"And why not?" he answered in mollified tones. "It's mighty good-natured in ye, too. But come in, all the three of ye, and have something to eat and to drink for the sake of the old country."

We followed him into a back parlour, where there were several wooden rocking-chairs, and a strong smell of stale tobacco. Here he busied

himself in producing cold meat, a squash pie, and a bottle of whiskey, and was as voluble as civil about every subject except the one I wished to talk of. But the memory of his mother was strong upon me, and I had no intention of letting it slide.

"I'm so glad to have found you," I said. "I am sure you can't have known what a trouble it has been to your mother never to have heard from you all these years."

"Arrah! And why should she bother herself over me?" he answered impatiently. "Sure I never was anything *but* a trouble to her, worse luck!" And before I could speak again, he went on, "But make your mind aisy, I'll be writing to her. Many's the time that I've all but indited the letter, but I'll do it now. Upon me conscience, ye may dipind upon me."

Could I depend upon his shambling conscience? Every instinct of an honest man about me answered, No. As he had done for fifteen years past, so he would do for fifteen years to come. As long as he was comfortable himself, his mother would never get a line out of him. Perhaps his voice recalled hers, but I almost fancied I could hear her as I sat there.—"I ax your pardon, darlin'. It was my own Mickey that was on my mind."

"Look here, Mr. Macartney," said I; "I want you to do me a favour. I owe your mother a good turn, and it'll ease my mind to repay it. Sit down whilst we're enjoying your hospitality, and just write her a line, and let me have the pleasure of finding a stamp and putting it in the post with my own hands."

We argued the point for some time, but Mickey found the writing materials at last, and sat down to write. As he proceeded he seemed to become more reconciled to the task; though he was obviously no great scribe, and followed the sentiments he was expressing with curious contortions of his countenance which it was most funny to behold. By-and-by I was glad to see a tear or two drop on to the paper, though I was sorry that he wiped them up with his third finger, and wrote over the place before it had time to dry.

"Murther and ages! But it's mighty pleased that she'll be," said Mr. Macartney when he had finished. He looked mighty pleased with himself, and he held the letter out to me.

"Do you mean me to read it?" I asked.

"I did. And ye can let your friends hear too."

I read it aloud, wondering as I read. If pen and ink spoke the truth, Biddy's own Mickey's heart was broke entirely with the parting from his mother. Sorra a bit of taste had there been in his food, or a drop of natural rest had he enjoyed for the last fifteen years. "Five thousand four hundred

and seventy-five days—no less." (When I reached this skilful adoption of my calculations, I involuntarily looked up. There sat Mr. Macartney in his rocking-chair. He was just lighting a short pipe, but he paused in the operation to acknowledge what he evidently believed to be my look of admiration with a nod and a wink. I read on.) Times were cruel bad out there for a poor boy that lived by his industry, but thank GOD he'd been spared the worst pangs of starvation (I glanced round the pop-shop, but as Mickey himself would have said, No matter!); and didn't it lighten his heart to hear of his dear mother sitting content and comfortable at her own coffee-stall. It was murderously hot in these parts, and New York—bad luck to it—was a mighty different place from the dear old Ballywhack where he was born. Would they ever see old Ireland again? (Here a big blot betrayed how much Mr. Macartney had been moved by his own eloquence.) The rest of the letter was rich with phrases both of piety and affection. How much of the whole composition was conscious humbug, and whether any of it was genuine feeling, I have as little idea now as I had then. The shallows of the human heart are at least as difficult to sound as its depths, and Mickey Macartney's was quite beyond me. One thing about the letter was true enough. As he said, it would "plaze the ould craythur intirely."

By the time I had addressed it "Mrs. Biddy Macartney, coffee-seller," to the care of the Dock-gate-keeper, we had not much spare time left in which to stamp and post it, so we took leave of the owner of the pop-shop. He was now very unwilling to let us go. He did not ask another question about his mother, but he was consumed with trivial curiosity about us. Once again he alluded to Biddy. We were standing outside, and his eye fell upon the row of shining pop-taps—

"Wouldn't she be the proud woman now, av she could see me!" he cried.

"Why don't you get her out to live with you?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I'm a married man, Mr.—bad luck to me, I've forgotten your name now?"

"I didn't trouble you with it. Well, I hope you'll go and see her before she dies."

But when I came to think of it, I did not feel sure if that was what I wished. Not being a woman, how could I balance the choice of pain? How could I tell if it were better for her to be disappointed with every ship and every tide, still having faith in her own Mickey, and hope of his coming, or for the tide and the ship to bring him with all his meanness upon the head she loved, a huge disappointment, once for all!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Roose the fair day at e'en."

Scotch Proverb.

AFTER leaving New York, we no longer hugged the coast. We stood right off, and to my great delight, I found we were going to put in at Bermuda for repairs. I never knew, but I always fancy that these were done cheaper there than at New York. Or it may merely have been because when we had been at sea two days the wretched "Slut" leaked so that, though we were pumping day and night, till we were nearly worn out, we couldn't keep the wet from the gimcrack cargo.

Fortunately for us the weather was absolutely lovely, and though it was hot by day, we wore uncommonly little clothing, and "carried our change of air with us," as Dennis said.

As to the nights, I never can forget the ideal beauty of the last three before we reached Bermuda. I had had no conception of what starlight can be and what stars can look like. These hanging lamps of the vast heavens seemed so strangely different from the stars that "twinkle, twinkle," as the nursery book has it, through our misty skies at home. We were, in short, approaching the tropics. Very beautiful were the strange constellations of the midnight sky, the magic loveliness of the moonlight, and the phosphorescence of the warm waves, whilst the last exquisite touch of delight was given by the balmy air. By day the heat (especially as we had to work so hard in it) made one's enjoyment less luxurious, but if my love for the sea had known no touch of disappointment on the cold swell of the northern Atlantic, it would have needed very dire discomfort to spoil the pleasure of living on these ever-varying blue waters, flecked with white foam and foam-like birds, through the clearness of which we now and then got a peep of a peacock-green dolphin, changing his colour with every leap and gambol, as if he were himself a wave.

Of living things (and, for that matter, of ships) we saw far less than I expected, though it was more than a fortnight from the time of our leaving Sandy Hook to the night we lay off to the east of the Bermudas—the warm lights from human habitations twinkling among the islands, and the cold light of the moon making the surf and coral reefs doubly clear against the dark waters—waiting, but scarcely wishing, for the day.

As I have said, Alfonso was very black, and Alfonso was very dignified. But his blackness,

compared with the blackness of the pilot who came off at St. George's Island, and piloted us through the Narrows, was as that of a kid-shoe to a boot that has been polished by blacking. As to dignity, no comparison can be made. The dignity of that nigger pilot exceeded anything, regal, municipal, or even parochial, that I have ever seen. As he came up the ship's side, Dennis was looking over it, and when the pilot stood on deck Dennis fled abruptly, and Alister declares it took two buckets of water to recover him from the fit of hysterics in which he found him rolling in the forecastle.

The pilot's costume bore even more reference to his dignity than to the weather. He wore a pea-coat, a tall and very shiny black hat, white trousers, and neither shoes nor socks. His feet were like flat-irons turned the wrong way, and his legs seemed to be slipped into the middle of them, like the handles of two queer-shaped hoes. His intense, magnificent importance, and the bombastic way he swaggered about the deck, were so perfectly absurd, that we three youngsters should probably have never had any feeling towards him but that of contempt, if it had not been that we were now quite enough of seamen to appreciate the skill with which he took us safely on our dangerous and intricate passage into harbour. How we ever got through the Narrows, how he picked our way amongst the reefs and islands, was a marvel. We came in so close to shore that I thought we must strike every instant, and so we should have done had there been any blundering on his part.

We went very slowly that day, as became the atmosphere and the scene, the dangers of our way, and the dignity of our guide.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said Dennis, as we hung over the side. "If it's for repairs we've put into Paradise, long life to the old tub and her rotten timbers! I wouldn't have missed *this* for a lady's berth in the West Indian Mail, and my passage paid!"

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

This was indeed worth having gone through a good deal to see. The channel through which we picked our way was marked out by little buoys, half white and half black, and on either side the coral was just a-wash. Close at hand the water was emerald green or rosy purple, according to its depth and the growths below; half a mile away it was deep blue against lines of dazzling surf and coral sand; and the reefs and rocks amongst whose deadly edges our hideous pilot steered for our lives, were like beds of flowers blooming under water. Red, purple, yellow, orange, pale green,

dark green, in patches quite milky, and in patches a mass of all sorts of seaweed, a gay garden on a white ground, shimmering through crystal! And down below the crabs crawled about, and the fishes shot hither and thither; and over the surface of the water, from reef to reef and island to island, the tern and sea-gulls skimmed and swooped about.

We anchored that evening, and the pilot went ashore. Lovely as the day had been, we were (for some mysterious reason) more tired at the end of it than on days when we had been working three times as hard. This, with Dennis, invariably led to mischief, and with Alister to intolerance. The phase was quite familiar to me now, and I knew it was coming on when they would talk about the pilot. That the pilot was admirably skilful in his trade, and that he was a most comical-looking specimen of humanity, were obvious facts. I quite agreed with both Alister and Dennis, but that, unfortunately, did not make them agree with each other. Not that Dennis contradicted Alister (he pretended to be afraid to do so), but he made comments that were highly aggravating. He did not attempt to deny that it was "a gran sight to see any man do his wark weel," or that the African negro shared with us "our common humanity and our immortal hopes," but he introduced the quite irrelevant question of whether it was not a loss to the Presbyterian Ministry that Alister had gone to sea. He warmly allowed that the pilot probably had his feelings, and added that even he had his; that the Hat tried them, but that the Feet were "altogether too many for them intirely." He received the information that the pilot's feet were "as his Creator made them," in respectful silence, and a few minutes afterwards asked me if I was aware of the "curious fact in physiology," that it took a surgical operation to get a joke through a Scotchman's brain-pan.

I was feeling all-overish and rather cross myself towards evening, and found Alister's cantankerousness and Dennis O'Moore's chaff almost equally tiresome. To make matters worse, I perceived that Dennis was now so on edge, that to catch sight of the black pilot made him really hysterical, and the distracting thing was, that either because I was done up, or because such folly is far more contagious than any amount of wisdom, I began to get quite as bad, and Alister's disgust only made me worse. I unfeignedly dreaded the approach of that black hat and those triangular feet, for they made me giggle in spite of myself, and I knew a ship's rules far too well not to know how fearful would be the result of any public exhibition of disrespect.

However, we three were not always together,

and we had been apart a good bit when we met (as ill-luck would have it) at the moment when the pilot's boat was just alongside, ready for his departure.

"What's the boat for?" asked Alister, who had been below.

"And who would it be for," replied Dennis, "but the gentlemen in the black hat? Alister, dear! What's the reason I can't tread on a nigger's heels without treading on your toes?"

"Hush!" cried I, in torment, "he's coming."

We stood at attention, but never can I forget the agony of the next few minutes. That hat, that face, those flat black feet, that strut, that smile. I felt a sob of laughter beginning somewhere about my waist-belt, and yet my heart ached with fear for Dennis. Oh, if only His Magnificence would move a little quicker, and let us have it over!

There's a fish at Bermuda that is known as the toad-fish (so Alfonso told me), and when you tickle it it blows itself out after the manner of the frog who tried to be as big as an ox. It becomes as round as a football, and if you throw it on the water it floats. If you touch it it sounds (according to Alfonso) "all same as a banjo." It will live some time out of water; and if it shows any signs of subsiding, another tickle will blow it out again. "Too muchee tickle him burst," said Alfonso. I had heard this decidedly nasty story just before the pilot's departure, and it was now the culmination of all the foolish thoughts that gibbered in my head. I couldn't help thinking of it as I held my breath to suppress my laughter, and quaked for the yet more volatile Dennis. Oh, dear! Why wouldn't that mass of absurdity walk quicker? His feet were big enough. Meanwhile we stood like mutes—eyes front! To have looked at each other would have been fatal. "Too muchee tickle him burst." I hoped we looked grave (I have little doubt now that we looked as if we were having our photographs taken). The sob had mounted from my waist to my throat. My teeth were set, my eyes watered, but the pilot was here now. In a moment he would be down the side. With an excess of zeal I found strength to raise my hand for a salute.

I fear it was this that pleased him, and made him stop; and we couldn't help looking at him. His hat was a little set back for the heat, his black triangular feet were in the third position of dancing. He smiled.

There was an explosive sound to my right. I knew what it meant. Dennis had "burst."

And then I never felt less like laughing in my life. Visions of insubordination, disrespect, mutiny, flogging, and black-hole, rushed through my head, and I had serious thoughts of falling on my

knees before the insulted pilot. With unfeigned gratitude I record that he was as magnanimous as he was magnificent. He took no revenge, except in words. What he said was :

"Me one coloured gentleman. You one dam mean white trash ob common sailor. YAH !"

And with unimpaired dignity he descended the ladder and was rowed away over the prismatic waters. And Alister and I turned round to look for Dennis, and found him sitting in the scuppers, wiping the laughter-tears out of his thick eyelashes.

There was something fateful about that evening, which was perhaps what made the air so heavy. If I had been keeping the log, I should have made the following entry : "Captain got drunk. A ring round the moon. Alister and Dennis quarrelsome."

I saw the ring round the moon when I was rowing the captain and the mate back from one of the islands, where they had been ashore. Alfonso afterwards pointed it out to me and said, "Tell you, Jack, I'm glad dis ole tub in harbour now !" From which I concluded that it was an omen of bad weather.

Alister and Dennis were still sparring. I began to think we'd better stretch a rope and let them have it out with their fists, but I could not make out that there was anything to fight about except that Alister had accused Dennis of playing the fool, and Dennis had said that Alister was about as good company as a grave-digger. I felt very feverish and said so, on which they both began to apologize, and we all turned in for some sleep.

Next day we were the best of friends, and we got leave to go ashore for a few hours. We were anchored in Grassy Bay, off Ireland Island—that is, off the island where the hulks are, and where the schoolmaster spent those ten long years. Alister and Dennis wanted to take a boat and make for Harrington Sound, a very beautiful land-locked sheet of water, with one narrow entrance through which the tide rushes like a mill-race, but when they heard my reason for wanting to have a look at my friend's old place of labour and imprisonment, they decided to stay with me, which, as it happened, was very lucky for us all.

We were all three so languid, that though there was much to see and little time in which to see it, when we found three firm and comfortable resting-places among the blocks of white stone in the dockyard, we sat down on them, and contented ourselves with enjoying the beautiful prospect before us. And it so happened that as Dennis said, "if we'd taken a box for the Opera" we could not have placed ourselves better for the marvellous spectacle that it was our good luck to witness. I must try and tell it in order.

The first thing we noticed was a change among the sea-birds. They left their careless, graceful skimming and swooping, and got into groups, wheeling about like starlings, and uttering curious cries. And scarcely had we become conscious of this change among the birds than a simultaneous flutter ran through the Bermudian "rig-boats" which had been skimming with equal carelessness about the bay. Now they were hurriedly thrown up into the wind, their wide mainsails lowered and reefed, whilst the impulse spread as if by magic to the men-of-war and ships in the anchorage. Down came the sails like falling leaves, the rigging swarmed with men bracing yards, lowering top-gallant masts, and preparing—we could not conceive for what.

"What, in the name of fortune——" said Dennis.

But at this moment Alister cried, "Look behind ye, man !"

We turned round, and this was what we saw—

The sky out to seaward was one great half-circle of blue black, but in what sailors call the eye of the storm, was another very regular patch, with true curved outlines of the arc and the horizon. Under this the sea was dazzlingly white, and then in front of that it was a curious green black, and it was tossing and flopping about as if it did not know what to be at. The wind was scarcely to be felt as wind, but we could hear it moaning in a dull way that was indescribably terrifying. Gradually the blackness seemed to come down over us as if it would swallow us up, and when I looked back to the bay not a bird was to be seen, and every boat was flying into shelter.

And as they fled, there arose from the empty sea and sky a strange hissing sound, which gradually grew so intense that it became almost a roar ; and, as the noise increased, the white line on the horizon widened and widened.

Suddenly there came a lull. It quite startled us. But about half a mile away, I could see over Alister's shoulders that the clouds were blacker, and the sea took up the colour and seemed to heave and rock more sulkily than before. There was no white water here, only a greenish ink. And at the same moment Dennis and Alister each laid a hand upon my arm, but none of us spoke. We lost ourselves in intense watching.

For by degrees the black water, leaving its natural motion, seemed to pile up under the black cloud, and then, very suddenly, before one could see how it happened, either the cloud stretched out a trunk to the sea, or the sea to the cloud, and two funnel-shaped masses were joined together by a long, twisting, whirling column of water that neither sea nor sky seemed able to break away

from. It was a weird sight to see this dark shape writhe and spin before the storm, and at last the base of it struck a coral reef, and it disappeared, leaving nothing but a blinding squall of rain and a tumult of white waves breaking on the reef. And then the water whirled and tossed, and flung its white arms about, till the whole sea, which had been ink a few minutes before, had lashed itself into a vast sheet of foam.

We relaxed our grip of each other, and drew breath, and Alister stretching his arms seawards after a fashion peculiar to him in moments of extreme excitement, gave vent to his feelings in the following words:

"Sirs! yon's a water-spout."

But before we had time to reply, a convict warder, whom we had not noticed, called sharply to us, "Lie down, or you'll be blown down!" and the gale was upon us. We had quite enough to do to hold on to the ground, and keep the stone-dust out of our eyes by shutting them. Further observations were impossible, though it felt as if everything in the world was breaking up, and tumbling about one's ears.

Luckily nothing did strike us, though not more than a hundred yards away a row of fine trees went down like a pack of cards, each one parallel with its neighbour. House-tiles flew in every direction, shutters where whipped off and whirled away; palm-trees snapped like fishing-rods, and when the wind-squall had passed, and we sat up, and tried to get the sand out of our ears, we found the whole place a mass of débris.

But when we looked seaward we saw the black arch going as fast as it came. All sense of fever and lassitude had left us. The air was fresh, and calm, and bright, and within half an hour the tern and seagulls were fishing over the reef and skimming and swooping above the prismatic waters as before.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;
* * * so shall inferior eyes,
That borrow their behaviours from the great,
Grow great by your example, and put on
The dauntless spirit of resolution."

King John, v. 1.

"CREAKY doors" are said to "hang long," and leaky ships may enjoy a similar longevity. It certainly was a curious fact that the "Water-Lily" hardly suffered in that storm, though the damage done to shipping was very great. Big and little, men-of-war and merchant-

men, very few escaped scot-free, and some dragged their anchors and were either on the reef in the harbour, or ran foul of one another.

Repairs were the order of the day, but we managed to get ours done and to proceed on our voyage, with very little extra delay.

I cannot say it was a pleasant cruise, though it brought unexpected promotion to one of the Shamrock three. In this wise:

The mate was a wicked brute, neither more nor less. I do not want to get into the sailor fashion of using strong terms about trifles, but to call him less than wicked would be to insult goodness, and if brutality makes a brute, he was brute enough in all conscience! Being short-handed, at Bermuda, we had shipped a wretched little cabin-boy of Portuguese extraction, who was a native of Demerara, and glad to work his passage there, and the mate's systematic ill-treatment of this poor lad was not less of a torture to us than to Pedro himself, so agonising was it to see, and not dare to interfere; all we could do was to aid him to the best of our power on the sly.

The captain, though a sneaking, unprincipled kind of man, was neither so brutal nor, unfortunately, so good a seaman as the mate; and the consequence of this was, that the mate was practically the master, and indulged his Snuffy-like passion for cruelty with impunity, and with a double edge. For, as he was well aware, in ill-treating Pedro he made us suffer, and we were all helpless alike.

His hold over the captain was not from superior seamanship alone. The "Water-Lily" was nominally a "temperance" vessel, but in our case this only meant that no rum was issued to the crew. In the captain's cabin there was plenty of "liquor," and the captain occasionally got drunk, and each time that he did so, the influence of the mate seemed riveted firmer than before. Crews are often divided in their allegiance, but the crew of the "Water-Lily" were of one mind. From the oldest to the youngest we all detested the mate, and a natural manliness of feeling made us like the captain better than we ought otherwise have done, because (especially as regards the drinking) we considered his relations with the mate to be characterised by anything but "fair play." No love was really lost between them, and if the captain came on deck and took the lead, they were almost certain to quarrel; (and none the less so, that we rushed with alacrity to obey the captain's orders, whereas with the mate's it was all "dragging work," as nearly as we dare show unwillingness).

What led to the extraordinary scene I am about to relate, I do not quite know. I suppose a mixture of things. Alister's minute, unbroken study

of what was now his profession, the "almost monotonous" (so Dennis said) perseverance with which he improved every opportunity, and absorbed all experience and information on the subject of seamanship, could hardly escape the notice of any intelligent captain. Our captain was not much of a seaman, but he was a "cute trader, and knew "a good article" in any line. The Scotch boy was soon a better sailor than the mate, which will be the less surprising, when one remembers how few men in any trade give more than about a third of their real powers to their work—and Alister gave all his. This, and the knowledge that he was supported by the public opinion of a small but able-bodied crew, may have screwed the captain's courage to the sticking-point, or the mate may have pushed matters just too far; what happened was this:

The captain and the mate had a worse quarrel than usual, after which the mate rope's-ended poor Pedro till the lad lost consciousness, and whilst I was comforting him below, the brute fumed up and down deck like a hyena ("sight o' blood all same as drink to the likes of him," said Alfonso, "make he drunk for more")—and vented some of his rage in abuse of the captain, such as we had often heard, but which no one had ever ventured to report. On this occasion Alfonso did report it. As I have said, I only knew results.

At eight o'clock next morning all hands were called aft.

The captain was quite sober, and he made very short work of it. He told us briefly and plainly that the mate was mate no longer, and asked if we had any wish as to his successor, who would be chosen from the crew. We left the matter in his hands, as he probably expected, on which, beckoning to Alister, he said, "Then I select Alister Auchterlay. He has proved himself a good and careful seaman, and I believe you all like and trust him. I beg you to show this now by obeying him. And for the rest of the voyage remember that he is *Mister Auchterlay*."

"Mr. Auchterlay" more than justified the captain's choice. His elevation made no change in our friendship, though the etiquette of the vessel kept us a good deal apart, and Dennis and I were all the "thicker" in consequence. Alister was not only absolutely loyal to his trust, but his gratitude never wearied of displaying itself in zeal. I often wondered how much of this the captain had foreseen. As Alfonso said, he was "good trader."

The latter part of the voyage was, in these altered circumstances, a holiday to what had gone before. The captain was never actually drunk again, and the "Water-Lily" got to look clean, thanks largely to the way Pedro slaved at scraping,

sweeping, swabbing, rubbing, and polishing, to please his new master. She was really in something like respectable harbour trim when we approached the coast of British Guiana.

Georgetown, so Alfonso told me, looks very odd from the sea. The first thing that strikes you being the tops of the trees, which seem to be growing out of the water; but as you get nearer you discover that this effect is produced by the low level of the land, which is protected from the sea by a sea-wall and embankment. I have no doubt Alfonso was right, but when the time came I forgot all about it, for it was not in ordinary circumstances that I first saw Georgetown.

It was one of those balmy, moonlit tropical nights of which I have spoken; but when we were within about an hour's sail of the mouth of the Demerara river, the sky ahead of us began to redden, as if the evening had forgotten itself and was going back to sunset. We made numberless suggestions, including that of a display of fireworks in our honour; but as the crimson spread and palpitated like an Aurora Borealis, and then shot up higher and flooded a large area of sky, Alister sang out "Fire!" and we all crowded forward in anxious curiosity.

As might be expected, Alfonso and Pedro were in a state of the wildest excitement. Alfonso, of course, thought of his lady-love, and would probably have collapsed into complete despair, but for the necessity of keeping up his spirits sufficiently to snub every suggestion made by the cabin-boy, whose rival familiarity with the topography of Georgetown he could by no means tolerate; whilst Pedro, though docile as a spaniel to us, despised Alfonso as only a half-caste can despise a negro somewhat blacker than himself, and burned for safe opportunities of displaying his superiority. But when Pedro expressed a somewhat contemptuous conviction that this glowing sky was the result of rubbish burning on plantations up the country, and skillfully introduced an allusion to relatives of his own who had some property in cane-fields, Alfonso's wrath became sublime.

"You no listen to dat trash ob cabin-boy," said he. "Wait a bit, and I'se find him dirty work below dat's fit for he. Keep him from troubling gentlemen like us wid him lies. Plantation? Yah! He make me sick. Tell you, we know Demerary well 'nuff. De town is in flames. Oh, my Georgiana!"

So much, indeed, was beyond doubt before long, and as the fire seemed perilously close to the wharves and shipping, the captain decided to lie off for the night. The thermometer in his cabin stood at ninety degrees, which perhaps accounted for his having no anxiety to go ashore; but, in

spite of the heat, Dennis and I were wild to see what was going on, and when Alister called to us to help to lower the jolly-boat, and we found we were to accompany him, we were not dilatory with the necessary preparations, and were soon rapidly approaching the burning town.

It was a strange sight as we drew nearer and nearer. Before us, on the sea, there was a line where the cold silver of the moonshine met the lurid reflections of the fiery sky, and the same cool light and hot glow changed places over our cheeks as we turned our heads, and contrasted on the two sides of the sail of the jolly-boat. And then we got within ear-shot. A great fire is terrible to see, but it is almost more terrible to hear, and it is curious how like it is to the sound of great waters or a great wind. The roar, the hiss, the crackle, the pitiless approach—as Dennis said—

“I’ll tell ye what it is, Jack. These elemental giants, when they do break loose from our service, have one note of defiance amongst them; and it’s that awe-ful roar!”

When we stood in the street where the fire was, it was deafening, and it kept its own distinctness above all other noises; and with the fire-bells, the saving and losing of household goods, and the trampling and talking of the crowd, there were noises not a few. Dennis and I were together, for Alister had business to do, but he had given us leave to gratify our curiosity, adding a kindly warning to me to take care of myself, and keep “that feather-brained laddie,” Dennis, out of danger’s way. We had no difficulty in reaching the point of interest, for, ludicrous to say, the fire was in Water Street; that is, it was in the street running parallel with the river and the wharves, the main business street of Georgetown. We were soon in the thick of the crowd, protecting our eyes from the falling fragments of burning wood, and acquiring information. That heap of smoking embers—so we were told—was the big store where it first broke out; the house yonder, where the engines were squinting away, and the fire putting tongues of flame out of the windows at them, as if in derision, cost two thousand dollars—“Ah! there goes the roof!”

It fell in accordingly; and, in the sudden blaze of its destruction, I saw a man come riding along, before whom the people made way, and then someone pulled me back and said:

“The Governor.”

He stopped near us, and beckoned someone to his side.

“Is he coming?”

“He’s here, sir;” and then into the vivid glare stepped a tall, graceful, and rather fantastical-looking young gentleman in a white jacket, and

with a long fair moustache, who raised his hand with a quick salute, and then stood at the governor’s stirrup.

“I know that fellow, I’m sure,” said Dennis.

“Royal Engineers officer,” said my neighbour. “Mark my words, that means gunpowder,” and the good man, who was stout and steaming with perspiration, seemed to feel like one who has asked for a remedy for toothache and been answered by the dentist—“Gunpowder is what it means! And if our governor had sent for a cobbler, *he’d* have said, ‘Nothing like leather,’ and mended the hose of the steam-pump. And that store of mine, sir, didn’t cost a cent less than—”

But I was watching the engineer officer, and catching fragments of the rapid consultation.

“Quite inevitable, sir, in my opinion.”

“Very good. You have full powers—instruct—colonel—magazine—do your best.”

The engineer officer had very long white hands, which I noticed as one went rapidly to his forehead, whilst with the other he caressed the dark nose of the governor’s horse, which had been rubbing its head against his shoulder. And then the governor rode away and left him.

The word “gunpowder” seemed to have brought soldiers to the spot in a sort of natural sequence. There was more quick saluting and short orders, and then all disappeared but one bronzed-looking sergeant, who followed the engineer stripping up and down as he jerked his head, and pulled his moustache, and seemed to have some design upon the gutters of the house-eaves, which took a good deal of explaining and saluting. Then we heard wheels and running footsteps, and I became sensible of great relief from the pressure of the crowd. The soldiers had come back again, running a hand-cart with four barrels of gunpowder, and the public made way for them even more respectfully than for the governor. As they set it down and wiped their faces, the sergeant began to give orders rather more authoritatively than his superior, and he also pointed to the gutters. On which the soldiers vanished as before.

“Can’t we help, I wonder?” said I.

“That’s just what I’m thinking,” said Dennis, and he strode up to the officer. But he was busy with his subordinate.

“Well, sergeant?”

“Not a fuse in the place, sir.”

“Pretty state of things! Get a hatchet.”

“They sent one, sir.”

“All right. This is the house.”

“The roof *’as* caught, you know, sir?”

“The less time to waste,” was the reply, and the young man took up a barrel in his hands and walked in with it, kicking the door open with his

foot. The sergeant must almost have trodden on his officer's heels, as he followed with the second, and before I could speak Dennis had shouldered the third.

"Here's diversion!" said he, and away he went.

There was the fourth barrel and there was I. I confess that I felt a twinge, but I followed the rest, and my barrel behaved as well as if it had been a cask of molasses, though the burning wood fell thickly over us all. As I groped my way in, the sergeant and Dennis came out, and by the time that they and some soldiers returned, dragging pieces of house-gutters after them, the fantastic young officer was pouring the gunpowder into a heap in the middle of the floor, by the light of a corner of the ceiling which was now on fire, and I was holding up a shutter, under his orders, to protect it from premature sparks. When he set down the barrel he shook some dirt from his fingers, and then pushing back his white shirt-sleeves from his wrists, he filled his joined hands as full with gunpowder as they would hold, and separating them very slightly let a tiny stream run out on to the floor as he walked backwards; and as fast as this train was laid, the thin line was covered from falling embers by the gutters turned over it upside down. Through the room, down along a passage between two houses, and so into the street, where the crowd had more or less assembled again. Then the officer emptied his hands, dusted them together, and said, "Clear everybody out."

The sergeant saluted—"May I fire it, sir?"

"No, thank you, sergeant; clear everybody out." The sergeant was evidently disappointed, and vented this on the civilian public—"That," said he, turning a blackened thumb over his shoulder, "is a 'eap of gunpowder. It's just a going to be hexploded." There was no need to "clear everybody out." *They went.* And we found ourselves alone with the soldiers, who were laughing, and saying that the crowd had taken a big cast-iron tank for the heap of gunpowder. We stood a little aside in obedience to a wave of the young officer's arm. Then he crossed the street to pick up a long piece of burning wood, and came back, the moonlight and the firelight playing by turns upon him.

I honestly confess that, fierce as the heat was, I turned cold. The experiences of the next few minutes were as follows: I saw the young engineer fire the train, and I heard a puff, and then I saw him fall, face downwards, behind the tank. I gave a cry, and started forward, and was brought up short by a back-hander on my chest from the sergeant. Then came a scrambling, rushing sound,

which widened into a deep roar, shaking the ground beneath our feet, and then the big building at which we were gaping seemed to breathe out a monstrous sigh, and then it fell in, and tumbled to pieces, quietly, swiftly, and utterly, like a house of cards.

And the fantastic-looking young officer got up and shook himself, and worried the bits of charred wood out of his long yellow moustaches.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Die Welt kann dir nichts darbieten, was sie von dir nicht empfangt."

SCHILLER.—*Der Menschenfeind.*

AFTER Alister had done the Captain's business, he made his way to the post-office and got our letters, thinking, as he cannily observed, that in widespread misfortunes the big are implicated with the little, that fire spares public buildings no more than private residences, and that if the post-office was overtaken by the flames, we might lose not only words of affection, but perhaps enclosures of value. In short, he had brought our letters, and dearly welcome they were.

I had three; one from my father, one from my mother (with a postscript by Jem), and a long one from Charlie. I read my father's first; the others were sure to be tender and chatty, and I could enjoy them at leisure.

My father's letter was, for him, a wonderful effort of composition, and it was far kinder than I had expected or deserved. He blamed me; but he took some blame to himself for our misunderstandings, which he hoped would never recur. He said (very justly) that if he had spoken harshly, he had acted as he believed to be best for me. Uncle Henry's office was an opening many parents envied for their sons, and he had not really believed that my fancy for the sea was more than a boyish whim. He was the last man in the world to thwart a real vocation, and no doubt (as my Uncle Henry and he had agreed, and, thank God, they had had a very pleasant brotherly bit of a chat over old times, and a glass of my grandfather's 1815 port) every Briton had a natural tendency to rule the waves, and it was stronger in some lads than others, as "Robinson Crusoe" alone would prove, a book which my uncle remembered had nearly cost him his life on a badly-made raft on the mill-dam, when he was a lad, and which would be read by boys with the real stuff in them, when half these modern books the Woods littered the farm parlour with were lighting the fire. My Uncle Henry had come for-

ward in a very gratifying way. He had mentioned that Benson, an exceedingly intelligent clerk of his, had spoken of me in the highest terms, and seemed to think that there was hardly anything in the way of distinction in an adventurous career which might not be open to me. I was not to be made vain by this, as Benson appeared to be an affectionate fellow, with a respect for the family of his employer very rare in these days. It had been a great comfort to my father, this visit from Uncle Henry. They were both greyheaded now, and Jem and I were all they had to come after them. Blood was thicker than water. As to my poor mother—

For a few minutes the letter danced up and down as if writ in water; then I dried my eyes, and found that she bore up pretty well in hopes of my return, and that Uncle Henry was communicating by this mail with a man of business in Halifax, N.S., who was instructed to take a passage home for me in a good vessel, and to defray any expenses of a reasonable nature in connection with my affairs. When I was safe home, my father added, he would take the best advice as to sending me to sea in a proper and suitable way. Dr. Brown had some relatives who were large ship-owners, and he seemed to be much interested in my career, out of regard to the family. I was to let nothing hinder me from coming home at once, as I valued the love and blessing of my affectionate father.

My mother's letter was infinitely tender, and it was curiously strong. Not a reproach or a lamentation, but some good counsel, shrewd as well as noble, and plenty of home news. Only at the end did she even speak of herself: "You see, my son, I have never had men belonging to me who earned their livelihood in foreign countries and by dangerous ways, but you may trust your old mother to learn to do and bear what other mothers go through with. She will learn to love the sea because you are a sailor, but, Jack, you must always give her a woman's bitter-sweet privilege of saying good-bye, and of packing up your things. I am getting the time over till you come back with socks. I am afraid they will blister your feet. Martha does not like them because they are like what the boys wear in the coal-pits, but Dr. Brown declares they are just right. He chose the worsted when we went to see Miss Bennet's mother at the Berlin shop, and left it himself as he drove home, with a bottle of red lavender for my palpitations. I shall never forget his kindness. He sat here for an hour and a half on Sunday, and spoke of you to your father as if you had been his own son; and he said himself he walked up and down Miss Bennet's, right through the shop and into the back parlour and out again, talking about you, till the place was quite full, and Mrs. Simpson could not remember

what she had dropped in for, which, as Dr. Brown said, was not to be wondered at, considering Miss Bennet completely forgot to take him upstairs to see her mother, and it never crossed his own mind till he stopped at our door and found the old lady's sleeping draught with my red drops. He says he called at your Uncle Henry's office, and congratulated him on having a nephew of spirit, and it was market day, so the office was full. Jem says I am to leave room for him, as he can't think of enough to say to fill a letter of his own, so I will only say God bless you! my darling boy, and bring you safe home to your poor mother.

"P.S.—If you love me come as quick as you can. You shall go off again."

This was Charlie's letter:

"MY DEAR JACK—I was so glad to get your letter. I knew you had gone off at last. It did not surprise me, for I was sure you would go some day. I believe I have a very mean spirit, for I felt rather hurt at first that you did not tell me; but Mr. Wood gave me a good scolding, and said I was not fit to have a friend if I could not trust him out of sight or out of hearing. And that's quite true. Besides, I think I knew more about it after Jem had been down. He has been so jolly to me since you left. It must be a splendid life on board ship, and I am glad you have been in the rigging, and didn't fall off. I wish you had seen an iceberg or a water-spout, but perhaps you will. For two days and two nights I was very miserable, and then Jenny rode down on Shag, and brought me a book that did me a great deal of good, and I'll tell you why. It's about a man whose friend is going to travel round the world, like you, and he has to be left behind, like me. Well, what does he do but make up his mind to travel round his own garden, and write a history of his adventures, just as if he had been abroad. And that's the book; and you can't tell what a jolly one it is. I mean to do the same, only as you are at sea I shall call it a Log. 'Log of a Voyage round the Garden, the Croft, and the Orchard, by the Friend he left behind him.' That's good, isn't it? I've been rather bothered about whether I should have separate books for each, or mix them all up; and then, besides, I've got to consider how to manage about the different times of year, for you know, of course, the plants and the beasts and everything are different at different times; but if I have a log of each place for each month, it would not be done by the time you come home. I think perhaps I shall have note-books for the four seasons, and that'll take a good while. Two of the best chapters in Jenny's book are called 'on my face' and 'on my back,' and they are about what he sees lying on his face and then on his back. I'm going to do the

same, and put down everything, just as it comes; beetles, chrysalises, flowers, funguses, mosses, earth-nuts, and land-snails, all just as I find them. If one began with different note-books for the creatures, and the plants, and the shells, it would be quite endless. I think I shall start at that place in the hedge in the croft where we found the humble-bee's nest. I should like to find a mole-cricket, but I don't know if they live about here. Perhaps our soil isn't light enough for them to make their tunnels in, but one ought to find no end of curious burrowing creatures when one is on one's face, besides grubs of moths to hatch afterwards. When I am on my back, I fancy what I shall see most of are spiders. You can't conceive what a lot of spiders there are in the world, all sorts and sizes. They are divided into hunters, wanderers, weavers, and swimmers. I expect you'll see some queer ones, if you go to hot places. And oh, Jack I talking of burrows, of course you're in Nova Scotia, and that's where Cape Sable is, where the stormy petrels make their houses in the sand. They are what sailors call Mother Carey's chickens, you know. I'm sure we've read about them in adventure books; they always come with storms, and sailors think they build their nests on the wave. But they don't, Jack, so *you* mustn't think so. They make burrows in the sand, and all day they are out on the wing, picking up what the storms toss to the top, and what the cooks throw overboard, and then they go home, miles and miles and miles at night, and feed their young. They don't take the trouble to make houses if they can find any old rabbit-burrows near enough to the sea, Mr. Wood says; like the puffins. Do you know, one evening when old Isaac came to see me, I made him laugh about the puffins till the tears ran down his face. It was with showing him that old stuffed puffin, and telling him how the puffin gets into a rabbit-burrow, and when the rabbit comes back they set to and fight, and the puffin generally gets the best of it with having such a great hooked nose. Isaac *was* so funny. He said he'd seen the rabbits out on the spree many and many a moonlight night when sober folks were in bed; and then he smacked his knees and said, 'But I'd give owt to see one on 'em just nip home and find a Pooffin upon t'hearthstun.' And, my dear Jack, who else has been to see me, do you think? Fancy! Lorraine! You remember our hearing the poor colonel was dead, and had left Lorraine all that he had? Well, do you know it is a great deal more than we thought. I mean he's got a regular estate and a big house with old pictures inside, and old trees outside. Quite a swell. Poor Lorraine! I don't mean poor because of the estate, because he's rich, of course; but do you

know, I think he's sadder than ever. He's very much cut up that the colonel died, of course, but he seems desperate about everything, and talks more about suicide than he did at Snuffy's, Jem says. One thing he is quite changed about; he's so clean! and quite a dandy. He looked awfully handsome, and Jenny said he was beautifully dressed. She says his pocket-handkerchief and his tie matched, and that his clothes fitted him so splendidly, though they were rough. Well, he's got a straight back, Jack; like you! It's hard he can't be happy. But I'm so sorry for him. He went on dreadfully because you'd gone, and said that was just his luck, and then he wished to Heaven he were with you, and said you were a lucky dog, to be leading a devil-me-care life in the open air, with nothing to bother you. He didn't tell me what he'd got to bother him. Lots of things, he said. And he said life was a wretched affair, all round, and the only comfort was none of his family lived to be old.

"*Wednesday.* I had to stop on Monday, my head and back were so bad, and all yesterday too. Dr. Brown came to see me, and talked a lot about you. I am better to-day. I think I had rather wound up my head with note-books. You know I do like having lists of everything, and my sisters have been very good. They got a lot of ruled paper very cheap, and have made me no end of books with brown paper backs, and Dr. Brown has given me a packet of bottle labels. You've only got to lick them and stick them on, and write the titles. He gave me some before, you remember, to cut into strips to fasten the specimens in my fern collection. I've got a dozen and a half books, but there will not be one too many. You see eight will go at once, with the four seasons 'on my face,' and the four 'on my back.' Then I want two or three for the garden. For one thing I must have a list of our perennials. I am collecting a good lot. Old Isaac has brought me no end of new ones out of different gardens in the village, and now the villagers know I want them, they bring me plants from all kinds of out-of-the-way places, when they go to see their friends. I've taken to it a good deal the last few weeks, and I'll tell you why. It was the week before you ran away that Bob Furniss came up one evening, and for a long time I could not think what he was after. He brought me a Jack-in-the-green polyanthus and a crimson bergamot from his mother, and he set them and watered them, and said he 'reckoned flowers was a nice pastime for any one that was afflicted,' but I felt sure he'd got something more to say, and at last it came out. He is vexed that he used to play truant so at school and never learned anything. He can't read a newspaper, and he can't write *or*

reckon, and he said he was 'shamed' to go to school and learn among little boys, and he knew I was a good scholar, and he'd come to ask if I would teach him now and then in the evening, and he would work in the garden for me in return. I told him I'd teach him without that, but he said he 'liked things square and fair,' and Mr. Wood said I was to let him; so he comes up after work-hours one night and I teach him, and then he comes up the next evening and works in the garden. It's very jolly because now I can plot things out my own way, and do them without hurting my back. I'm going to clear all the old rose-bushes out of the shady border. The trees are so big now, it's so shady that the roses never come to anything but blight, and I mean to make a fernery there instead. Bob says there's a little wood belonging to Lord Beckwith that the trustees have cut down completely, and it's going to be ploughed up. They're stubbing up the stumps now, and we can have as many as we like for the carting away. Nothing makes such good ferneries, you get so many cranberries and corners. Bob says it's not far from the canal and he thinks he could borrow a hand-cart from the man that keeps the post-office up there, and get a load or two down to the canal-bank, and then fetch them down to our place in the 'Adela.' Oh, how I wish you were here to help! Jem's going to. He's awfully kind to me now you're gone. Talking of the 'Adela,' if you are very long away (and some voyages last two or three years), I think I shall finish the garden, and the croft and the orchard, or at any rate one journey round them; and I think for another of your voyages, I will do the log of the 'Adela' on the canal, for with water-plants, and shells, and larvæ, and beasts that live in the banks, it would be splendid. Do you know one might give a whole book up easily to a list of nothing but willows and osiers, and the different kinds of birds and insects that live in them? But the number of kinds there are of some things is quite wonderful. What do you think of more than a hundred species of iris, and I've only got five in the garden, but one of them is white. I don't suppose you'll have much time to collect things, but I keep hoping that some day, if I live, you'll command a ship of your own, and take me with you, as they do take scientific men some voyages. I hope I shall live. I don't think I get any worse. Cripples do sometimes live a long time. I asked Dr. Brown if he believed any cripple had ever lived to be a hundred, and he said he didn't know of one, nor yet ninety, nor eighty, for I asked him. But he's sure cripples have lived to be seventy. If I do, I've got fifty-four years yet. That sounds pretty well, but it soon goes, if one has a lot to do. Mr. Wood

doesn't think it likely you could command a vessel for twenty years at least. That only leaves thirty-four for scientific research, and all the arranging at home besides. I've given up one of my books to plotting this out in the rough, and I see that there's plenty of English work for twenty years, even if I could count on all my time, which (that's the worst of having a bad back and head!) I can't. There's one thing I should like to find out, if ever you think of going to Japan, and that's how they dwarf big plants like white lilacs, and get them to flower in tiny pots. Isaac says he thinks it must be continual shifting that does it—shifting and forcing. But I fancy they must have some dodge of taking very small cuttings from particular growths of the wood. I mean to try some experiments. I am marking your journeys on a map, and where anything happens to you I put A, for adventure, in red ink. I have put A, where you picked up Dennis O'Moore. He must be very nice. Tell him I hope I shall see him some day, and your Scotch friend too; I hope they won't make you quite forget your poor friend Charlie.

"P.S.—Since I finished, a parcel came. What do you think Lorraine has done? He has paid for me to be a life member of a great London library, and sent me the catalogue. I can have out fifteen books at a time. There are hundreds of volumes. I can't write any more, my back aches so with putting crosses against the books I want to read. The catalogue is rather heavy. I think I shall use one of my books to make a list in of what I want to read during this year. Isn't it good of Lorraine? Poor Lorraine!"

Having devoured my own letters, I looked up to see how my comrades were enjoying their share of the budget which the Halifax postmaster had faithfully forwarded.

The expression on Dennis O'Moore's face was so mixed that it puzzled me, but he did not look satisfied with his letter, for he kept drawing it out again, and shaking it, and peeping into the envelope as if he had lost something. At last he put the whole thing into his pocket with a resigned air, and drove his hands through his black curls, saying—

"The Squire all over, God help him!"

"What has he done now?" I asked.

"Sent me twenty pounds, and forgotten to enclose it!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Thus the merry Pau-Puk-Keewis
Danced his Beggar's Dance to please them,
And, returning, sat down laughing."

Hiawatha.

"God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures
Boasts two soul-sides; one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her."

Robert Browning.

THE fact that when we got back to the "Water-Lily," Alister found the captain dead drunk in his cabin, sealed our resolution to have nothing more to do with her when we were paid off, and our engagement ended (as had been agreed upon) in the Georgetown harbour. There was no fear that we should fail to get berths as common seamen now, if we wanted them; and there was not a thing to regret about the "Slut," except perhaps Alfonso, of whom we were really fond. As it turned out, we had not even to mourn for him, for he cut cable from the "Water-Lily" too, having plans of his own, about which he made a great deal of mystery and displayed his wonted importance, but whether they were matrimonial or professional, I doubt if even Dennis knew at the time.

Alister *had* something to lose. It was not a small consideration to give up his mate's berth, but he said the whole conduct of the ship was "against his conscience," and that settled the matter, to him.

When we were our own masters once more, we held another big council about our future. If I went home at once, I must, somehow or other, get back to Halifax before I could profit by Uncle Henry's arrangement. If Dennis went home, he must equally depend on himself, for there was no saying when the Squire would, or would not, find out and rectify his omission. Alister's mother had sent him some stamps for postage, and his paternal relative had sent him a message to the effect that having had neither word nor wittens of him for a considerable period, and having feared the worst, he was thankful to learn of his safe arrival in Halifax, Nova Scotia; and trusted that the step he had taken, if a thought presumptuous at his years, yet betokened a spirit of self-reliance, and might prove not otherwise than conducive to his welfare in the outcome.

Altogether, we were, practically, as much dependent on ourselves as when we sat under the pine-trees in Nova Scotia.

"We'll look up my cousin, to begin with," said Dennis.

"Are ye pairfectly convinced that he's here?" asked Alister, warned by his own experience.

"Certainly," said Dennis.

"Have ye corresponded with him of late?" pursued Alister.

"Not I, indeed. The O'Moores are by no means good letter-writers at the best of times, but he'd have let us know if he was dead, anyhow, and if he's alive, we'll be as welcome as the flowers."

Before Alister could reply, he was interrupted by a message from our late captain. The "Water-Lily" was still in harbour, and the captain wanted the ex-mate to help him on some matters connected with the ship or her cargo. Alister would not refuse, and he was to be paid for the job, so we hastily arranged that he should go, and that Dennis and I should devote the evening to looking up the Irish cousin, and we appointed to meet on the "stelling" or wharf, alongside of which the "Water-Lily" lay, at eleven o'clock on the following morning.

"I was a fool not to speak to that engineer fellow the other night," said Dennis, as we strolled on the shady side of a wide street, down the middle of which ran a wide water-dyke fringed with oleanders. "He would be certain to know where my cousin's place is."

"Do you know him?" I asked, with some eagerness, for the young officer was no small hero in my eyes.

"Oh, yes, quite well. He's a lieutenant in the Engineers. He has often stayed at my father's for shooting. But he has been abroad the last two or three years, and I suppose I've grown. He didn't know——"

"There he is!" said I.

He was coming out of a garden-gate on the other side of the street. But he crossed the road, saying, "Hi, my lads!" and putting his hand into his pocket as he came.

"Here's diversion, Jack!" chuckled Dennis; he's going to tip us for our assistance in the gun-powder plot. Look at him now! Faith, he's as short of change as myself. How that half-crown's eluding him in the corner of his pocket! It'll be no less, I assure ye. He's a liberal soul. Now for it!"

And as the young lieutenant drew near, Dennis performed an elaborate salute. But his eyes were brimming with roguishness, and in another moment he burst out laughing, and after one rapid glance, and a twist of his moustache that I thought must have torn it up by the roots, the young officer exploded in the same fashion.

"DENNIS!—What in the name of the mother of mischief (and I'm sure she was an O'Moore)

are you masquerading in that dress for, out here?" But before Dennis could reply, the lieutenant became quite grave, and turning him round by the arm, said, "But this isn't masquerading, I see. Dennis, my dear fellow, what does it mean?"

"It means that I was a stowaway, and my friend here a castaway—I mean that I was a castaway, and Jack was a stowaway. Willie, do you remember Barton?"

"Old Barney? Of course I do. How did he come to let you out of his sight?"

Dennis did not speak. I saw that he could not, so I took upon me to explain.

"They were out in the hooker, off the Irish coast, and she went to pieces in a gale. Old Barney was lost, and we picked Dennis up."

He nodded to me, and with his hand through Dennis O'Moore's arm, said kindly, "We'll go to my quarters, and talk it over. Where are you putting up?"

"We're only just paid off," said I.

"Then you'll rough it with me, of course, both of you."

I thanked him, and Dennis said, "Willie, the one thing I've been wanting to ask you is, if you know where that cousin of my father's lives, who is in business out here. Do you know him?"

"Certainly. I'm going there to-night, for a dance, and you shall come with me. I can rig you out."

They went ahead, arm-in-arm, and I followed at just sufficient distance behind to catch the backward looks of amazement which the young officer's passing friends were too polite to indulge when exactly on a level with him. He capped first one and then another with an air of apparent unconsciousness, but the contrast between his smart appearance and spotless white uniform, and the patched remains of Dennis's homespun suit (to say nothing of the big bundle in which he carried his "duds"), justified a good deal of staring, of which I experienced a humble share myself.

Very good and pleasant are the comforts of civilization, as we felt when we were fairly established in our new friend's quarters. Not that the first object of life is to be comfortable, or that I was moved by a hairsbreadth from my aims and ambitions, but I certainly enjoyed it; and, as Dennis said, "Oh, the luxury of a fresh-water wash!"—for salt-water really will not clean one, and the only way to get a fresh-water wash at sea is to save out of one's limited allowance. We had done this, to the extent of two-thirds of a pailful, as we approached Guiana, and had been glad enough all to soap in the same bucket (tossing for turns) and rinse off with clean sea-water, but real "tubs" were a treat indeed!

I had had mine, and, clothed in a white suit, nearly as much too big for me as the old miser's funeral gloves, was reposing in a very easy chair, when Dennis and his friend began to dress for the dance. The lieutenant was in his bedroom, which opened to the left out of the sitting-room where I sat, and Dennis was tubbing in another room similarly placed on the right. Every door and window was open to catch what air was stirring, and they shouted to each other, over my head, so to speak, while the lieutenant's body-servant ran backwards and forwards from one to the other. He was, like so many soldiers, an Irishman, and having been with his master when he visited the O'Moores, he treated Dennis with the utmost respect, and me with civility for Dennis's sake. He was waiting on his master when the lieutenant shouted—

"Dennis! what's your length, you lanky fellow?"

"Six foot two by the last notch on the front door. I stood in my socks, and the Squire measured it with his tape."

"Well, there's half an inch between us if he's right; but that tape's been measuring the O'Moores from the days of St. Patrick, and I've a notion it has shrunk with age. I think my clothes will do for you."

"Thank you, thank you, Willie! You're very good."

In a few minutes O'Brien came out with his arms full of clothes, and pursued by his master's voice.

"O'Brien's bringing you the things; can he go in? Be quick and finish off that fresh-water business, old fellow, and get into them. I promised not to be late."

I tried to read a newspaper, but the cross-fire of talk forbade anything like attention.

"Was ye wanting me, sorr?"

"No, no. Never mind me, O'Brien. Attend to Mr. O'Moore. Can he manage with those things?"

"He can, sorr. He looks illigant," replied O'Brien from the right-hand chamber. We all laughed, and Dennis began to sing:

"Oh, once we were illigant people,
Though we now live in cabins of mud;
And the land that ye see from the steeples,
Belonged to us all from the flood.
My father was then king of Connaught—"

"And mislaid his crown, I'll be bound!" shouted the lieutenant. "Look here, Dennis, you'll get no good partners if we're late, and if you don't get a dance with your cousin's daughter, you'll miss a treat, I can tell you. But dancing out here isn't trifled with as it is in temperate climates, and cards are made up early."

By-and-by he shouted again,
"O'Brien!"

"Coming, your honour."

"I don't want you. But is Mr. O'Moore ready?"

"He is, sorr, barring the waistcoat. Take a fresh tie, Master Dennis. The master'll not be pleased to take ye out with one like that. Sure it's haste that's the ruin of the white ties all along. Did ye find the young gentleman a pair of shoes, sorr?"

"Won't those I threw in fit you?" asked our host.

"I've got them. The least bit too large. A thousand thanks."

"Can you dance in them?"

"I'll try," replied Dennis, and judging by the sound, he did try then and there, singing as he twirled,

"Bad luck to this marching,
Pipe-claying and starching,
How neat one must be to be killed by the French!"

But O'Brien's audible delight and the progress of the song were checked by the lieutenant, who had dressed himself, and was now in the sitting-room.

"O'Brien!"

"Sorr!"

"If Mr. O'Moore is not ready, I must go without him."

"He's ready and waiting, sorr," replied O'Brien.

"Have ye got a pocket-handkerchief, Master Dennis, dear? There's the flower for your coat. Ye'll be apt to give it away, maybe; let me use a small pin. Did the master not find ye any gloves? Now as the squire saw ye, it's a proud man he'd be! Will I give ye the young gentleman one of your hats, sorr?"

"Yes, of course. Be quick! So there you are at last, you young puppy. Bless me! how like the squire you are."

The squire must have been amazingly handsome, I thought, as I gazed admiringly at my comrade. Our staring made him shy, and as he blushed and touched up the stephanotis in his buttonhole, the engineer changed the subject by saying, "Talking of the squire, is it true, Dennis, what Jack tells me about the twenty pounds? Did he really forget to put it in?"

"As true as gospel," said Dennis, and taking up the tails of his coat he waltzed round the room to the tune of

"They say some disaster
Befell the paymaster,
On my conscience, I think that the money's not there!"

I stood out on the verandah to see them off, Dennis singing, and chaffing and chattering to the last. He waved his hat to me as his friend gathered the reins, a groom sprang up behind, and

they were whirled away. The only part of the business I envied them was the drive.

It was a glorious night, despite the oppressive heat and the almost intolerable biting of mosquitoes and sandflies. In the wake of the departing trap flew a solitary beetle, making a noise exactly like a scissor-grinder at work. Soft and silent moths—some as big as small birds—went past my face, I fear to the hanging lamp behind me. Passing footfalls echoed bluntly from the wooden pavement, and in the far-away distance the bullfrogs croaked monotonously. And down below, as I looked upon the trees, I could see fireflies coming and going, like pulsations of light, amongst the leaves.

O'Brien waited on me with the utmost care and civility; served me an excellent supper, with plenty of ice and cooling drinks, and taught me the use of the "swizzle stick" for mixing them. I am sure he did not omit a thing he could think of for my comfort. He had been gone for some time, and I had been writing letters, turning over the engineer's books, and finally dozing in his chair, when I was startled by sounds from his bedroom, as if O'Brien were engaged, first in high argument, and then in deadly struggle with some intruder. I rushed to his assistance, and found him alone, stamping vehemently on the floor.

"What's the matter?" said I.

"Matther is it? Murther's the matther," and he gave another vicious stamp, and then took a stride that nearly cost him his balance, and gave another. "I beg yor pardon, sorr; but it's the cockroaches. The place swarms wid 'em. Av they'd keep peaceably below, now, but invading the master's bedroom—that's for ye, ye thief!" and he stamped again.

"The creatures here are a great plague," said I, slapping a mosquito upon my forehead.

"And that as true a word as your honour ever spoke. They're murderous no less! Many's the time I'm wishing myself back in old Ireland, where there's no venomous beasts at all, at all. Arrah! Would ye, ye skulking—"

I left him stamping, and streaming with perspiration, but labouring loyally on in a temperature where labour was little short of heroism.

I went back to my chair, and began to think over my prospects. It is a disadvantage of idleness that one wearies oneself with thinking, though one cannot act. I wondered how the prosperous sugar-planter was receiving Dennis, and whether he would do more for him than one's rich relations are apt to do. The stars began to pale in the dawn without my being any the wiser for my speculations, and then my friends came home. The young officer was full of hopes that I had

been comfortable, and Dennis of regrets that I had not gone with them. His hair was tossed, his cheeks were crimson, and he had lost the flower from his buttonhole.

"How did you get on with your cousin?" I asked. The reply confounded me.

"Oh, charmingly! Dances like a fairy. I say, Willie, as a mere matter of natural history, d'ye believe any other human being ever had such feet?"

A vague wonder crept into my brain whether the cousin could possibly have become half a nigger, from the climate, which really felt capable of anything, and have developed feet like our friend the pilot; but I was diverted from this speculation by seeing that Dennis was clapping his pockets and hunting for something.

"What have you lost now?" asked his friend.

"My pocket-handkerchief. Ah, there it is!" and he drew it from within his waistcoat, and with it came his gloves, and a third one, and they fell on the floor. As he picked the odd one up the lieutenant laughed.

"What size does she wear, Dennis—sixes?"

"Five and three-quarters—long fingers; so she tells me." He sighed, and then wandered to the window, whistling "Robin Adair."

"Now, Dennis, you promised me to go straight to bed. Turn in we must, for I have to be on an early parade."

"All right, Willie. Good-night, and a thousand thanks to you. It's been a great evening—I never was so happy in my life. Come along, Jack."

And off he went, tossing his head and singing to the air he had been whistling:

"Who in the song so sweet?
Eileen aroon!
Who in the dance so fleet!
Eileen aroon!
Dear were her charms to me,
Dearest her laughter free,
Dearest her constancy,
Eileen aroon!"

"She'll be married to a sugar-planter before you've cut your wisdom teeth!" bawled the engineer from his bed-room.

"Will she?" retorted Dennis, and half-laughing, half-sentimentally, he sang on louder than before,

"Were she no longer true,
Eileen aroon!
What should her lover do?
Eileen aroon!
Fly with his broken chain,
Far o'er the bounding main,
Never to love again,
Eileen aroon!"

Willie made no reply. He evidently meant to secure what sleep there was to be had, and as Dennis did not seem in the mood for discussing our prospects as seamen, I turned into my ham-

mock and pulled it well round my ears to keep out bats, night-moths, and the like.

It was thus that I failed at first to hear when Dennis began to talk to somebody out of the window. But when I lifted my head I could hear what he said, and from the context I gathered that the other speaker was no less than Alister, who, having taken his sleep early in the night, was now refreshing himself by a stroll at dawn. That they were squabbling with unusual vehemence was too patent, and I was at once inclined to lay the blame on Dennis, who ought, I felt, to have been brimming over with generous sympathy, considering how comfortable we had been, and poor Alister had not. But I soon discovered that the matter was no personal one, being neither more nor less than an indignant discussion as to whether the air which Dennis was singing was "Scotch" or "Irish." As I only caught the Irish side of the argument, I am not qualified to pronounce any opinion.

"Of course facts are facts, no one denies that. And its likely enough your grandmother sang 'Robin Adair' to it, and your great-grandmother too, rest her soul! But it would take an uncommonly great-grandmother of mine to have sung it when it was new, for it's one of the oldest of old Irish airs."

"Stole it of course! as they did plenty more in those times—cattle and what not. I'd forgive them the theft, if they hadn't spoilt the tune with a nasty jerk or two that murders the tender grace of it intirely."

"Alister, me boy! You're not going? Ye're not cross, are ye? Faith, I'd give my life for ye, but I can't give ye Eileen aroon. Come in and have some swizzle! We're in the height of luxury here, and hospitality as well, and ye'll be as welcome as daylight."

"Up so late? Up so early, ye mean! Ah, don't put on that air of incorruptible morality. Wait now till I get in on the one side of my hammock and out at the other, and I'll look as early-rising-proud as yourself. Alister! Alister, dear!"

Through all this the engineer made no sign, and it struck me how wise he was, so I pulled the hammock round me again and fell asleep; not for long, I fancy, for those intolerable snaffles woke me once more before Dennis had turned in.

I looked out and saw him still at the window, his eyes on a waning planet, his cheek resting on the little glove laid in his right hand, and singing more sweetly than any nightingale:

"Youth must with time decay,
 Eileen aroon!
 Beauty must fade away,
 Eileen aroon!
 Castles are sacked in war,
 Chieftains are scattered far,
 Truth is a fixed star,
 Eileen aroon!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Which is why I remark,
 And my language is plain,
 That for ways that are dark,
 And for tricks that are vain,
 The heathen Chinese is peculiar."

Bret Hart.

ALISTER did more than pick pink-pale oleanders by the dyke side that morning. His business with the captain was soon despatched, and in the course of it he "fore-gathered," as he called it, with the man of business who had spoken to us on the night of the great fire, and whose own warehouse was in ruins. He proved to be a Scotchman by birth, and a man of energy (not a common quality in the tropics), and he was already busy about retrieving his fortune. The hasty repair of part of the building, in which to secure some salvage, and other similar matters, was his first object; and he complained bitterly of the difficulty of inducing any of the coloured gentlemen to do a "fair day's work for a fair day's wage," except when immediate need pressed them. They would then work, he said, but they would not go on working till the job was done, only till they had earned enough wages to take another idle "spell" upon.

Several Chinamen were already busy among the ruins of the burnt houses, as we saw, and it was Chinese labour that Alister's friend had resolved to employ; but he seemed to think that, though industrious, those smiling, smooth-faced individuals, who looked as if they had come to life off one of my mother's old tea-cups, were not to be trusted alone among the salvage.

"Every thief among 'em's as good as a conjuror," he declared, "and can conceal just anything up his sleeve.

Thus it came about that when Dennis and I went down to the stelling to meet Alister, as we had agreed, and delivered the messages of hospitality with which the young engineer and Dennis's cousin had charged us, we found that he had made an engagement to help the burnt-out store-owner for such time as we should be out of seamen's work, on terms which were to include his board and lodging.

"Alister, dear! I admire ye with all me heart," said Dennis impetuously. "I never saw such an industrious, persevering fellow. If all Scotch lads take the tide of life at the flood as you do, small blame to ye for making your fortunes; and well ye deserve it."

"There's not a doubt about it," replied Alister complacently. "And I'll tell ye more. Find me any grand work, if it's at the other end of the airth, whether it's digging a dyke in the desert, or bigging a mountain up to the moon, and I'll find ye an Aberdeenshire man no far from the head of it."

Dennis's face seemed to twitch with a dozen quick thoughts and smiles, as Alister turned away to meet his new employer, who had just appeared on the stelling.

"They have wonderful qualities," he said gently. "I envy them, I can tell ye, Jack. What's an idle lout like me good for? Will I ever be able to make a home for myself, or for any one else? *They do!*" He spoke earnestly, and then suddenly relapsing into an imitation of Alister's accent, which was his latest joke, he added with twinkling eyes, "and they save a *wee* in wages to their *ain* trumpeters—*whiles!*"

And having drawled out the word "whiles" to the uttermost possible length, he suddenly began to snap his fingers and dance an Irish jig upon the wooden planks of the stelling. This performance completely demoralised the Chinamen who caught sight of it. "Eyah!" they cried, they stopped work, they chuckled, they yelled, they doubled themselves up, some of their pig-tails came down, and one and all they laughed so frankly and immoderately, it was hard to believe that anything like deception could be amongst the faults of these almond-eyed children of the Flowery Land.

Mr. Macdonald (the store-owner) seemed, however, to think that they required pretty close watching, and I do not think he would have been willing to let Alister go back with us to luncheon at Willie's, but for his appreciation of social rank. It was obvious that it did Alister no harm that he had a friend in an officer of her Majesty's Service, and a comrade in the nephew of a sugar-planter of the uppermost level of Demerara society.

We three held a fresh council as we sat with the young engineer. He and Alister got on admirably, and he threw himself into our affairs with wonderful kindness. One point he disposed of at once, and that was *my* fate! There could be no question, he said, that my duty was to get back to Halifax, "report myself" to Uncle Henry's agent there, and then go home.

"You're ruthlessly dismembering the Shamrock, Willie," Dennis objected.

"I don't see that. *You're* not to stay here, for instance."

"You're mighty positive," said Dennis, blushing.

"Of course I am. I wouldn't encourage you to waste sentiment anyhow; and the West Indies is no latitude for boys, to go on with. And you know as well as I do, that it's rather more than time the Squire started you in life. You must go home, Dennis!"

"If I do, I go with Jack. And what about Alister?"

The young officer tugged his moustaches right and left. Then he said, "If I were exactly in your place, Anchterlay——"

"Well, sir?" said Alister, for he had hesitated.

—"I should—enlist in the Royal Engineers."

"Nothing like gunpowder," whispered Dennis to me. I kicked him in return.

The pros and cons of the matter were not lengthy. If Alister enlisted in any regiment, the two advantages of good behaviour and good education would tell towards his advancement more rapidly and more certainly than perhaps in any other line of life. If he enlisted into a scientific corps, the chance of being almost immediately employed as a clerk was good, very much of the work would be interesting to an educated and practical man; the "marching, pipe-claying and starching," of which Dennis sang, was a secondary part of "R.E." duties at any time, and there were special opportunities of employment in foreign countries for superior men. Alister was not at all likely to remain long a private, and it was quite "on the cards" that he might get a commission while he was still young. So much for "peace time." But if—in the event of—and supposing (here the young engineer made a rapid diversion into the politics of the day) there was a chance of "active service"—the Royal Engineers not only offered far more than drill and barrack duties in time of peace, but no branch of the army gave nobler opportunities for distinguished service in time of war. At this point he spoke with such obvious relish, that I saw Dennis was ready to take the Queen's Shilling on the spot. Alister's eyes gave a flash or two, but on the whole he "kept a calm sough," and put the other side of the question.

He said a good deal, but the matter really lay in small compass. The profession of arms is not highly paid. It was true that the pay was poor enough as a seaman, and the life far harder, but then he was only bound for each voyage. At other times he was his own master, and having "gained an insight into" trading from his late captain, he saw indefinite possibilities before him.

Alister seemed to have great faith in openings, opportunities, chances, etc., and he said frankly that he looked upon his acquired seamanship simply as a means of paying his passage to any part of the habitable globe where fortunes could be made.

"Then why not stick together?" cried Dennis. "Make your way up to Halifax with us, Alister, dear. Maybe you'll find your cousin at home this time, and if not, at the worst, there's the captain of our old ship promised ye employment. Who knows but we'll all go home in her together? Ah, let's keep the Shamrock whole if we can?"

"But you see, Dennis," said the lieutenant, "Alister would regard a voyage to England as a step backward, as far as his objects are concerned."

Dennis always maintained that you could never contrive to agree with Alister so closely that he would not find room to differ from you.

So he nudged me again (and I kicked him once more) when Alister began to explain that he wouldn't just say *that*, for that during the two or three days when he was idle at Liverpool he had been into a free library to look at the papers, and had had a few words of converse with a decent kind of an old body, who was a care-taker in a museum where they bought birds and beasts and the like from seafaring men that got them in foreign parts. So that it had occurred to him that if he could pick up a few natural curiosities in the tropics, he might do worse, supposing his cousin be still absent from Halifax, than keep himself from idleness, by taking service in our old ship, with the chance of doing a little trading at the Liverpool Museum.

"I wish I hadn't broken that gorgeous lump of coral Alfonso gave me," said Dennis. "But it's as brittle as egg-shell, though I rather fancy the half of it would astonish most museums. You're a wonderful boy, Alister! Ah, we'll all live to see the day when you're a millionaire, laying the foundation-stone of some of these big things the Aberdeen men build, and speechifying away to the rising generation of how ye began life with nothing but a stuffed Demerary parrot in your pocket. Willie, can't ye lend me some kind of a gun, that I may get him a few of these highly painted fowl of the air? If I had but old Barney at my elbow now—God rest his soul!—we'd give a good account of ourselves among the cockatoos. Many's the lot of seabirds we've brought home in the hooker to stuff the family pillows. But I'm no hand at preparing a bird for stuffing."

"I'll cure them," said I; "the schoolmaster taught me."

"Then we're complete entirely, and Alister'll die the Provost of Aberdeen. Haven't I got the

whole plan in my head? (And it's the first of the O'Moore's that ever developed a genius for business!) Swap crimson macaws with green breasts in Liverpool for cheap fizzing drinks, trade them in the thirsty tropics for palm-oil; steer for the north pole, and retail that to the oleaginous Esquimaux for furs; sell them in Paris in the autumn for what's left of the summer fashions, and bring these back to the ladies of Demerary; buy——"

"Dennis! stop that chattering," cried our host; "there's some one at the door."

We listened. There was a disturbance below stairs, and the young officer opened the door and shouted for his servant, on which O'Brien came up three at a time.

"What is it, O'Brien?"

"A Chinese, your honour. I asked him his business, and not a word but gibberish will he let out of him. But he's brought no papers nor parcels at all, andorra peep will I let him have of your honour's room. The haythen thief!"

But even as O'Brien spoke, a Chinaman, in a China-blue dress, passed between him and the door-post, and stood in the room.

"Who are you?" asked the engineer peremptorily.

"Ah-Fo," was the reply, and the Chinaman bowed low.

"You can understand English, if you can't speak it, eh?"

The Chinaman smiled. His eyes rolled round the room till he caught sight of Alister, then suddenly producing three letters, fanwise, as if he were holding a hand at whist, he jerked up the centre one, like a "forced" card in a trick, and said softly, "For you"—and still looking round with the others in his hand, he added, "For two; allee same as you," and as Alister distributed them to Dennis and me, his wooden face took a few wrinkles of contempt, and he added, "One nigger bringee. Mister Macdonald, he send me."

After this explanation he stood quite still. Even his face was unmoved, but his eyes went round and to every corner of the room. I was so absorbed in watching him that Dennis was reading his letter aloud before I had opened mine. But they were all alike, with the exception of our names. They were on pink paper, and highly scented. This was Dennis O'Moore's:

"*Hymeneal*.—Mr. Alfonso St. Vincent and Miss Georgiana Juba's compliments are respectfully offered, and will be happy of Mr. Dennis O'Moore's company on the occasion of the celebration of their nuptials. Luncheon at twelve on the auspicious day, Saturday——"

"Oh, botheration! It's six weeks hence," said Dennis. "Will we be here, I wonder?"

"We'll go if we are." "Poor old Alfonso!" "Well done, Alfonso!" Such were our sentiments, and we expressed them in three polite notes, which the Chinaman instantaneously absorbed into some part of his person, and having put the hand with which he took them to his head and bowed lowly as before, he went away. And O'Brien, giving one vicious dust with his coat-sleeve of the doorpost, which Ah-Fo had contaminated by a passing touch, followed the "heathen thief" to see him safe off the premises.

"That's a strange race, now——" began Alister, but I ran to the window, for Dennis was on the balcony watching for the Chinaman, and remembering the scene on the stelling, I anticipated fun.

"Hi, there! Fe-fo-fum, or whatever it is that they call ye!"

Ah-Fo looked up with a smile of delighted recognition, which, as Dennis gave a few preliminary stamps, and began to whistle and shuffle, expanded into such hearty laughter, that he was obliged to sit down to it by the roadside.

"Look here, Dennis," said our host; "we shall have a crowd collecting if you go on with this tomfoolery. Send him off."

"All right, old fellow. Beg your pardon. Good-bye Te-to-tum."

It was not a respectful farewell, but there is a freemasonry of friendliness apart from words. Dennis had a kindly heart toward his fellow-creatures everywhere, and I never knew his fellow-creatures fail to find it out.

"Good-bye," said Ah-Fo, lingeringly.

"Good-bye again. I say, old mandarin," added the incorrigible Dennis, leaning confidentially over the balcony, "got on pretty well below there? Or did O'Brien keep the tail of his eye too tight on ye? Did ye manage to coax a great-coat or a hall-table, or any other trifle of the kind up those sleeves of yours?"

This time Ah-Fo looked genuinely bewildered, but he gazed at Dennis as if he would have given anything to understand him.

"Uppee sleevee—you know?" said Dennis, illustrating his meaning by signs. ("Chinese is a mighty easy language, Willie, I find, when you're used to it.")

A grin of intelligence spread from ear to ear on Ah-Fo's countenance.

"Eyah!" said he, and with one jerk he produced our three letters, fan-fashion, in his right hand, and then they vanished as quickly, and he clapped his empty palms and cried, "Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

"It's clever, there's no denying," said Alister, "but it's an uncanny kind of cleverness."

Something uncannier was to come. Ah-Fo had

stood irresolute for a minute or two, then he appeared to make up his mind, and coming close under the balcony he smiled at Dennis and said, "You lookee here." Then feeling rapidly in the inner part of his dress he brought out a common needle, which he held up to us, then pricked his finger to show that it was sharp, and held it up again, crying "You see?"

"I see," said Dennis. "Needle. Allee same as pin, barring that a pin's got a head with no eye in it, and a needle's got an eye with no head to it."

"You no talkee, you lookee," pleaded Ah-Fo.

"One for you, Dennis," laughed the engineer. We looked, and Ah-Fo put the needle into his mouth and swallowed it. He gave himself a pat or two and made some grimaces to show that it felt rather prickly going down, and then he produced a second needle, and tested and then swallowed that. In this way he seemed to swallow twelve needles, nor, with the closest watching, could we detect that they went anywhere but into his mouth.

"Will he make it a baker's dozen, I wonder?" gasped Dennis.

But this time Ah-Fo produced a small ball of thread, and it followed the needles, after which he doubled himself up in uneasy contortions, which set us into fits of laughter. Then he put his fingers into his mouth—we watched closely—and slowly, yard after yard, he drew forth the unwound thread, and all the twelve needles were upon it. And whilst we were clapping and cheering him, both needles and thread disappeared as before.

Ah-Fo was evidently pleased by our approval, and by the shower of coins with which our host rewarded his performance, but when he had disposed of them in his own mysterious fashion, some source of discontent seemed yet to remain. He looked sadly at Dennis and said, "Ah-Fo like to do so, allee same as you." And then began gravely to shuffle his feet about, in vain efforts, as became evident, to dance an Irish jig. We tried to stifle our laughter, but he was mournfully conscious of his own failure, and, when Dennis whistled the tune, seemed to abandon the task in despair, and console himself by an effort to recall the original performance. After standing for a few seconds with his eyes shut and his head thrown back, so that his pigtail nearly touched the ground, the scene appeared to return to his memory. "Eyah!" he chuckled, and turned to go, laughing as he went.

"Don't forget the letters. Uppee sleevee, old Teatray!" roared Dennis.

Ah-Fo flirted them out once more. "Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed he, and went finally away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Das Haar trennt." *German Proverb.*

WE three were not able to be present at Alfonso's wedding, for the very good reason that we were no longer in British Guiana. But the day we sailed for Halifax, Alfonso and his Georgiana came down to see us on the stelling. "Georgiana" was as black as a coal, but Alfonso had not boasted without reason of the cut of her clothes. She had an upright pretty figure, and her dress fitted it to perfection. It was a white dress, and she had a very gorgeous parasol, deeply fringed, and she wore a kerchief of many colours round her shoulders, and an equally bright silk one cleverly twisted into a little cap on her woolly head. Her costume was, in short, very gay indeed.

"Out of all the bounds of nature and feminine modesty," said Alister.

"Of your grandmother's nature and modesty, maybe," retorted Dennis. "But she's no gayer than the birds of the neighbourhood, anyway, and she's as neat, which is more than ye can say for many a young lady that's not so black in the face."

In short, Dennis approved of Alfonso's bride, and I think the lady was conscious of it. She had a soft voice, and very gentle manners, and to Dennis she chatted away so briskly that I wondered what she could have found to talk about, till I discovered from what Dennis said to Alister afterwards, that the subject of her conversation was Alfonso's professional prospects.

"Look here, Alister dear," said Dennis; "don't be bothering yourself whether she employs your aunt's dressmaker or no, but when you're about halfway up that ladder of success, that I'll never be climbing (or I'd do it myself), say a good word for Alfonso to some of these Scotch captains with big ships, that want a steward and stewardess. That's what she's got her eye on for Alfonso, and Alfonso has been a good friend to us."

"I'll mind," said Alister. And he did. For (to use his own expression) our Scotch comrade was "aye better than his word."

Dennis O'Moore's cousin behaved very kindly to us. He was not only willing to find Dennis the money which the Squire had failed to send, but he would have advanced my passage-money to Halifax. I declined the offer for two reasons. In the first place, Uncle Henry had only spoken of paying my passage from Halifax to England,

and I did not feel that I was entitled to spend any money that I could avoid spending; and, secondly, as Alister had to go north before the mast, I chose to stick by my comrade, and rough it with him. This decided Dennis. If Alister and I were going as seamen, he would not "sneak home as a passenger."

The elderly cousin did not quite approve of this, but the engineer officer warmly supported Dennis, and he was also upheld in a quarter where praise was still dearer to him, as I knew, for he took me into his confidence, when his feelings became more than he could comfortably keep to himself.

"Perhaps she won't like your being a common sailor, Dennis," I had said, "and you know Alister and I shall quite understand about it. We know well enough what a true mate you've been to us, and Alister was talking to me about it last night. He said he didn't like to say anything to you, as he wouldn't take the liberty of alluding to the young lady, but he's quite sure she won't like it, and I think so too."

I said more than I might otherwise have done, because I was very much impressed by Alister's unusual vehemence on the subject. He seldom indeed said a word that was less than a boast of Scotland in general, and Aberdeenshire in particular, but on this occasion it had burst forth that though he had been little "in society" in his native country, he had "seen enough to know that a man would easier live down a breach of a' the ten commandments than of any three of its customs." And when I remembered for my own part, how fatal in my own neighbourhood were any proceedings of an unusual nature, and how all his innocence, and his ten years of martyrdom, had not sufficed with many of Mr. Wood's neighbours to condone the "fact" that he had been a convict, I agreed with Alister that Dennis ought not to risk the possible ill effects of what, as he said, had a neer-do-weel, out-at-elbows, or, at last and least, an uncommon look about it; and that having resumed his proper social position, our Irish comrade would be wise to keep it in the eyes he cared most to please.

"Alister has a fine heart," said Dennis, "but you may tell him I told her," and he paused.

"What did she say?" I asked anxiously.

"She said," answered Dennis slowly, "that she'd small belief that a girl could tell if a man were true or no by what he seemed as a lover, but there was something to be done in the way of judging of his heart by seeing if he was kind with his kith and faithful to his friends."

It took me two or three revolutions of my brain to perceive how this answer bore upon the question, and I repeated it to Alister, his comment was almost as enigmatical.

"A man," he said sententiously, "that has been blessed with a guid mother, and that gives the love of his heart to a guid woman, may aye gang through the ills o' this life, like the children of Israel through the Red Sea, with a wall on's right hand and a wall on's left."

But it was plain to be seen that the young lady approved of Dennis O'Moore's resolve, when she made us three scarlet night-caps for deck-wear, with a tiny shamrock embroidered on the front of each.

Indeed, as to clothes and comforts of all sorts, we began our homeward voyage in a greatly renovated condition, thanks to our friends. The many kindnesses of the engineer officer were only matched by his brusque annoyance if we "made a fuss about nothing," and between these, and what the sugar-planter thought due to his relative, and what the sugar-planter's daughter did for the sake of Dennis, the only difficulty was to get our kits stowed within reasonable seamen's limits. The sugar-planter's influence was of course invaluable to us in the choice of a ship, and we were very fortunate. The evening we went on board I accompanied Dennis to his cousin's house to bid good-bye, and when we left, Miss Eileen came with us through the garden to let us out by a short cut and a wicket-gate. She looked prettier even than usual, in some sort of pale greenish-grey muslin, with knots of pink ribbon about it, and I felt very much for Dennis's deplorable condition, and did my best in the way of friendship by going well ahead among the oleanders and evergreens, with a bundle which contained the final gifts of our friends. Indeed I waited at the wicket-gate not only till I was thoroughly tired of waiting, but till I knew we dare wait no longer, and then I went back to look for Dennis.

About twenty yards back I saw him, as I thought, mixed up in some way with an oleander-bush in pink blossom, but, coming nearer, I found that it was Eileen's grey-green dress with the pink bows, which, like a slackened sail, was flapping against him in the evening breeze, as he knelt in front of her.

"Dennis," said I, not too loud; not loud enough in fact, for they did not hear me; and all that Dennis said was, "Take plenty, Darlin'!"

He was kneeling up, and holding back some of the muslin and ribbons with one hand, whilst with the other he held out a forelock of his black curls, and she cut it off with the scissors out of the sailor's housewife which she had made for him. I turned my back and called louder.

"I know, Jack. I'm coming this instant," said Dennis.

The night was noisy with the croaking of frogs, the whirring and whizzing of insects, the cheeping of bats, and the distant cries of birds, but Dennis

and Eileen were silent. Then she called out, "Good-bye, Jack, GOD bless you."

"Good-bye, Miss Eileen, and GOD bless you," said I, feeling nearly as miserable as if I were in love myself. And then we ran all the rest of the way to the stelling.

Alister was already on board, and the young officer was there to bid us GOD speed, and Dennis was cheerful almost to noisiness.

But when the shores of British Guiana had become a muddy-looking horizon line, I found him, with his cropped forehead pressed to the open housewife, shedding bitter tears among the new needles and buttons.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Zur tiefen Ruh, wie er sich auch gefunden.

* * * * *
Sein Geist ist's, der mich ruft."

Wallenstein's Tod.

NOT the least troublesome part of our enlarged kit was the collection of gay-plumaged birds. Their preservation was by no means complete, and I continued it at sea. But between climate and creatures, the destructiveness of the tropics is distracting to the collector, and one or two of my finest specimens fell into heaps of mangled feathers, dust, and hideous larvæ under my eyes. It was Dennis O'Moore's collection. He and his engineer friend were both good shots, and they had made an expedition on purpose to get these birds for Alister. There were some most splendid specimens, and the grandest of all, to my thinking, was a Roseate Spoon-bill, a wading, fish-catching bird of all shades of rose, from pale pink to crimson. Even his long horny legs were red. But he was not a pleasant subject for my part of the work. He smelt like the "Water-Lily" at her worst, before we got rid of the fish cargo.

Knowing that he had got them for Alister, I was rather surprised one day when Dennis began picking out some of the rarest birds and put them aside. It was so unlike him to keep things for himself. But as he turned over the specimens, he began to ask me about Cripple Charlie, whose letter he had read. Meanwhile he kept selecting specimens, and then returning them to the main body again, "Ah, we mustn't be robbing Alister, or he'll never die Provost of Aberdeen. In the end he had gathered a very choice and gorgeous little lot, and then I discovered their destination. "We'll get them set up when we get home," he said; "I hope Charlie'll

like 'em. They'll put the old puffin's nose out of joint anyway, for as big as it is!"

Our ship was a steamship, a well-founded vessel, and we made a good passage. The first mate was an educated man, and fond of science. He kept a meteorological log, and the pleasantest work we ever did was in helping him to take observations. We became very much bitten with the subject, and I bought three pickle-bottles from the cook, and filled them with gulf-weed and other curiosities for Charlie, and stowed these away with the birds.

Dennis found another letter from his father awaiting him at the Halifax post-office. The Squire had discovered his blunder, and sent the money, and the way in which Dennis immediately began to plan purchases of all sorts, from a birch-bark canoe to a bearskin rug, gave me a clue to the fortunes of the O'Moores. I do not think he would have had enough left to pay his passage if we had been delayed for long. But our old ship was expected any hour, and when she came in we made our way to her at once, and the upshot of it all was, that Dennis and I shipped in her for the return voyage as passengers, and Alister as a seaman.

Nothing can make the North Atlantic a pleasant sea. Of the beauty and variety of warmer waters we had nothing, but we had the excitement of some rough weather, and a good deal of sociability and singing when it was fair, and we were very glad to be with our old mates again, and yet more glad that every knot on our course was a step nearer home. Dennis and I were not idle because we were independent, and we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. As to Alister, there was no difficulty in seeing how well he stood with the red-bearded captain, and how good a friend his own energy and perseverance (with perhaps some touch of clannishness to boot) had gained for him. Dennis and I always shared his watches, and they were generally devoted to the discussing and rediscussing of our prospects, interspersed with fragmentary French lessons.

From the day that Alister had heard Dennis chatter to the squaw, through all our ups and downs, at sea and ashore, he had never flagged in his persistent profiting by Dennis's offer to teach him to speak French. It was not, perhaps, a very scholarly method which they pursued, but we had no time for study, so Dennis started Alister every day with a new word or sentence, and Alister hammered this into his head as he went about his work, and recapitulated what he had learned before. By the time we were on our homeward voyage, the sentences had become very complex, and it seemed probable that Alister's ambition to take part in a "two-handed crack" in French

with his teacher, before the shamrock fell to pieces, would be realized.

"What he has learnt is wonderful, I can tell ye," said Dennis to me, "but his accent's horrid! And we'd get on faster than we do if he didn't argue every step we go, though he doesn't know a word that I've not taught him."

But far funnier than Alister's corrections of his teacher, was a curious jealousy which the boatswain had of the Scotch lad's new accomplishment. We could not quite make out the grounds of it, except that the boatswain himself had learned one or two words of what he called *parly voo* when he was in service at the boys' school, and he was jealously careful of the importance which his shreds and scraps of education gave him in the eyes of the ordinary uneducated seaman. With Dennis and me he was uniformly friendly, and he was a most entertaining companion.

Owing to head winds, our passage was longer than the average. A strange thing happened towards the end of it. We had turned in for sleep one night, when I woke to the consciousness that Dennis had got out of his berth, and was climbing past mine, but I was so sleepy that I did not speak, and was only sure that it was not a dream, when Alister and I went on deck for the next watch, and found Dennis walking up and down in the morning mist.

"Have you had no sleep?" I asked, for his face looked haggard.

"I couldn't. For dreaming," he said, awkwardly.

I laughed at him.

"What have you been dreaming about?"

"Don't laugh, Jack. I dreamt of Barney."

"Well, that's natural enough, Dennis. This end of the voyage must recall the poor fellow."

"I wouldn't mind if it was a kindly dream. But I dreamed he'd an old woman's bonnet on and a handkerchief tied over it. It haunts me."

"Go back to bed," I advised. "Perhaps you'll dream of him again looking like himself, and that will put this out of your head."

Dennis took my advice, and I stood Alister's watch with him, and by-and-by Dennis appeared on deck again looking more at ease.

"Did you dream of him again?" I asked. He nodded.

"I did—just his own dear self. But he was sitting alone on the edge of some wharf gazing down into the water, and not a look could I get out of him till I woke."

The following morning Dennis was still sound asleep when I rose and went on deck. The coast of Ireland was just coming into sight through the haze when he joined me, but before pointing it

out to him, I felt curious to know whether he had dreamed a third time of old Barney.

"Not I," said he; "all I dreamed of was a big rock standing up out of the sea, and two children sitting on it had hold of each other's hands."

"Children you know?"

"Oh dear, no! Just a little barefoot brother and sister."

He seemed to wish to drop the subject, and at this moment a gleam of sunshine lit up the distant coast line with such ethereal tints, that I did not wonder to see him spring upon the bulwarks and catching a ratlin with one hand, wave his cap above his head with the other, crying, "God bless the Emerald Isle!"

We reached Liverpool about four o'clock in the afternoon, and as we drew up alongside of the old wharf, my first thought was to look for Biddy Macartney. Alister had to remain on board for a time, but Dennis came willingly with me in search of the old woman and her coffee-barrow. At last we betook ourselves to the Dock-gatekeeper, to make inquiries, and from him we heard a sad story. The old woman had "failed a deal of late," he said. He "had heard she wasn't right in her mind, but whether they'd shifted her to a 'sylum or not, he couldn't say." If she was at home, she was at an address which he gave us.

"Will you go, Dennis? I must. At once."

"Of course."

Biddy was at home, and never whilst I live can I forget the "home." Four blocks of high houses enclosed a small court into which there was one entrance, an archway through one of the buildings. All the houses opened into the court. There were no back-doors, and no back premises whatever. All the dirt and (as to washing) all the cleanliness of a crowded community living in rooms in flats, the quarrelling and the love-making, the old people's resting, and the children's playing;—from emptying a slop-pail to getting a breath of evening air—this court was all there was for it. I have since been told that if we had been dressed like gentlemen, we should not have been safe in it, but I do not think we should have met with any worse welcome if we had come on the same errand—"to see old Biddy Macartney."

Roughly enough, it is true, we were directed to one of the houses, the almost intolerable stench of which increased as we went up the stairs. By the help of one inmate and another, we made our way to Biddy's door, and then we found it locked.

"The missis 'll be out," said a deformed girl who was pulling herself along by the balustrades. She was decent-looking and spoke civilly, so I

ventured to ask, "Do you mean that old Biddy is out?"

"Nay, not Biddy. The woman that sees to her. When she's got to go out she locks t'old lass up to be safe," and volunteering no further help, the girl rested for a minute against the wall with her hand to her side, and then dragged herself in to one of the rooms and shut the door in our faces.

The court without and the houses within already resounded so to the squalling of children, that I paid no attention to the fact that more of this particular noise was coming up the stairs; but in another moment a woman, shaking a screaming baby in her arms and dragging two crying children at her skirts, clenched her disengaged fist (it had a key in it) close to our faces and said, "And which of you vagabones is t'old lass's son?"

"Neither of us," said I, "but we want to see her, if we may. Are you the woman who takes care of her?"

"I've plenty to do minding my own, I can tell ye," she grumbled, "but I couldn't abear to see t'ould lass taken to a 'sylum. They're queer places some on 'em, as I know. And as to t'House! There's a many folks says, 'Well if t'guardians won't give her no relief, let her go in.' But she got hold on me one day, and she says, 'Sally, darling' (that's t'ould lass's way, is calling ye Darling). It sounds soft, but she is but an old Irish woman, as one may say, 'if ever,' she says, 'you hear tell of their coming to fetch me, GOD bless ye,' she says, 'just give me a look out of your eye, and I'm gone. I'll be no more trouble to any one,' she says, 'and maybe I'll make it worth your while too.'"

At this point in her narrative the woman looked mysterious, nodded her head, craned over the banisters to see that no one was near, slapped the children and shook up the baby as a sort of mechanical protest against the noise they were making (as to effects they only howled the louder), and drawing nearer to us, spoke in lower tones:

"T'old lass has money, it's my belief, though she gives me nowt for her lodging, and she spends nowt on herself. She's many a time fair clemmed, I'll assure ye, till I can't abear to see it, and I give her the bit and sup I might have had myself, for I'm not going to rob t'children neither for her nor nobody. Ye see it's her son that's preying on her mind. He wrote her a letter awhile ago, saying times was bad out yonder, and he was fair heart-broke to be so far away from her, and she's been queer ever since. She's wanted for everything herself, slaving and saving to get enough to fetch him home. Where she hides it I know no more nor you, but she wears a sight of old rags, one atop of another, and pockets in all of 'em for

ought I know—hold your din, ye unwrely children! —there's folks coming. I'll let ye in. I lock t'old lass up when I go out, for she might be wandering, and there's them hereabouts that would reckon nought of putting her out of t'way and taking what she's got, if they heard tell on't."

At last the door was unlocked and we went in. And sitting on a low box, dressed as before, even to the old coat and the spotted kerchief over her bonnet, sat Biddy Macartney.

When she lifted her face, I saw that it was much wasted, and that her fine eyes had got a restless uneasy look in them. Suddenly this ceased, and they lit up with the old intelligence. For half an instant I thought it was at the sight of me, but she did not even see me. It was on Dennis O'Moore that her eyes were bent, and they never moved as she struggled to her feet, and gazed anxiously at his face, his cap, and his seafaring clothes, whilst, for his part, Dennis gazed almost as wildly at her. At last she spoke:

"God save ye, Squire! Has the old country come to this? Is the O'Moore an alien, and all?"

"No, no. I'm the Squire's son," said Dennis. "But tell me quick, woman, what are you to Barney Barton?"

"Barney is it? Sure he was brother to me, as who knows better than your honour?"

"Did *you* live with us, too?"

"I did, acushla. In the height of ease and comfort, and done nothin' for it. Wasn't I the big fool to be marryin' so early, not knowin' when I was well off!"

"I know. Barney has told me. A Cork man, your husband, wasn't he? A lazy, drunken, ill-natured rascal of a fellow."

"That's him, your honour!"

"Well, you're quit of him long since. And, as your son's in New York, and all I have left of Barney is you——"

"She doesn't hear you, Dennis."

I interrupted him, because in his impetuosity he had not noticed that the wandering look had come back over the old woman's face, and that she sat down on the box, and fumbled among her pockets for Mickey's letter, and then crouched weeping over it.

We stayed a long time with her, but she did not really revive. With infinite patience and tenderness, Dennis knelt beside her, and listened to her ramblings about Mickey, and Mickey's hardships, and Mickey's longings for home. Once or twice, I think, she was on the point of telling about her savings, but she glanced uneasily round the room and forbore. Dennis gave the other woman some money, and told her to give Biddy a good meal—to have given money to her would

have been useless—and he tried hard to convince the old woman that Mickey was quite able to leave America if he wished. At last she seemed to take this in, and it gave her, I fear, undue comfort, from the conviction that, if this were so, he would soon be home.

After we left Biddy, we went to seek decent lodgings for the night. For Dennis was anxious to see her again in the morning, and of course I stayed with him.

"Had you ever seen her before?" I asked, as we walked.

"Not to remember her. But Jack, it wasn't Barney I saw in that first dream. It was Bridget."

Dennis was full of plans for getting her home with him to Ireland; but when we went back next day, we found a crowd round the archway that led into the court. Prominent in the group was the woman who "cared for" Biddy. Her baby was crying, her children were crying, and she was crying too. And with every moment that passed the crowd grew larger and larger, as few things but bad news can make a crowd grow.

We learnt it very quickly. Biddy had been so much cheered up by our visit, that when the woman went out to buy supper for them, she did not lock the door. When she came back, Biddy was gone. To do her neighbours justice, we could not doubt—considering how they talked then—that they had made inquiries in all the streets and courts around.

"And wherever t'owld lass *can* ha' gone!" sobbed the woman who had been her neighbour, in the noblest sense of neighbourhood.

I was beginning to comfort her when Dennis gripped me by the arm:

"I know," said he. "Come along."

His face was white, his eyes shone, and he tossed his head so wildly he looked madder than Biddy had looked; but when he began to run, and roughs in the streets began to pursue him, I ran too, as a matter of safety. We drew breath at the dock-gates.

The gatekeeper told us that old Biddy, "looking quite herself, only a bit thinner like," had gone through the evening before, to meet someone who was coming off one of the vessels, as he understood, but he had not noticed her on her return. He had heard her ask some man about a ship from New York.

I wanted to hear more, but Dennis clutched me again and dragged me on.

"I'll know the wharf when I see it," said he.

Suddenly he stopped, and pointed. A wharf, but no vessel, only the water sobbing against the stones.

"That's the wharf," he gasped. "That's where he sat and looked down. *She's there!*"

He was right. We found her there at ebb of tide, with no sign of turmoil or trouble about her, except the grip that never could be loosened with which she held Mickey's one letter fast in her hand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The lighthouse-top I see?
Is this the hill? Is this the Kirk?
Is this mine own cuntry?"

"We drifted o'er the harbour bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep away."

The Ancient Mariner.

WHEN Alister joined us the first evening after we came back from poor Biddy, he was so deeply interested in hearing about her, that he would have gone with us the next morning, if he had not had business on hand. He had a funny sort of remorse for having misjudged her the day she befooled the sentry to get me off. Business connected with Biddy's death detained Dennis in Liverpool for a day or two, and as I had not given any warning of the date of my return to my people, I willingly stayed with him. My comrades had promised to go home with me before proceeding on their respective ways, but (in answer to the letter which announced his safe arrival in Liverpool) Alister got a message from his mother summoning him to Scotland at once on important family matters, and the shamrock fell to pieces sooner than we had intended. In the course of a few days, Dennis and I heard from our old comrade.

"The Braes of Buie.

"MY DEAR JACK AND DENNIS: I am home safe and sound, though not in time for the funeral, which (as partly consequent on the breaking of a tube in one engine, and a trifling damage to the wheels of a second that was attached, if ye understand me, with the purpose of rectifying the deficiencies of the first, the Company being, in my humble judgment, unwisely thrifty in the matter of second-hand boilers) may be regarded as a Dispensation of Providence, and was in no degree looked upon by any member of the family as a wanting of respect towards the memory of the deceased. With the sole and single exception of Miss Margaret MacCantywhapple, a far-away

cousin by marriage, who, though in good circumstances, and a very virtuous woman, may be said to have seen her best days, and is not what she was in her intellectual judgment, being afflicted with deafness and a species of palsy, besides other infirmities in her faculties. I misdoubt if I was wise in using my endeavours to make the poor body understand that I was at the other side of the world when my cousin was taken sick, all her response being, '*they aye say so.*' However, at long and last, she was brought to admit that the best of us may misjudge, and as we all have our faults, and hers are for the most part her misfortunes, I tholed her imputations on my veracity in the consideration of her bodily infirmities.

"My dear mother, thank GOD, is in her usual, and overjoyed to see my face once more. She desires me to present her respects to both of you, with an old woman's blessing. I'm aware that it will be a matter of kindly satisfaction to you to learn that her old age is secured in carnal comforts through my father's cousin having left all his worldly gear for her support; that is, he left it to me, which is the same thing. Not without a testimony of respect for my father's memory, that all the gear of Scotland would be cheap to me by the side of; and a few words as to industry, energy, and the like, which, though far from being deserved on my part, sound—like voices out of the mist upon the mountain side—sweeter and weightier, it may be, than they deserve, when a body hears them, as ye may say, out of the grave.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and it's not for me to complain of the downbreak in the engines, seeing that in place of rushing past the coast, we just crawled along the top of these grand cliffs in the bonny sunshine, which hardly wakes a smile upon the stern faces of them, while the white foam breaks at no allowance about their feet. Many's the hour, Jack, I've lain on the moss, and looked down into a dark cove to watch the tide come in, and turn blue, and green, and tawny purple over the weeds and rocks, and fall back again to where the black crags sit in creamy surf with sea-birds on their shoulders. Eh! man, it's sweet to come home and see it all again; the folk standing at their doors, and bairns sitting on the dykes with flowers in their hands, and the waving barley-fields on the cliff tops shining against the sea and sky, as lights and shades change their places over a woman's hair. There were some decent bodies in the train beside me, that thought I was daft, with my head out of the window, in an awful draught, at the serious risk of brow-ague, not to speak of coal-smuts, which are horrid if ye get them in your eye. And not

without reason did they think so, for I'll assure ye I would have been loth to swear whether it was spray or tears that made my cheeks so salt when I saw the bit herring-boats stealing away out into the blue mist, for all the world as if they were laddies leaving home to seek their fortunes, as it might be ourselves.

"But I'm taking up your time with havers about my own country, and I ask your pardon; though I'm not ashamed to say that, for what I've seen of the world—tropics and all—give me the north-east coast of Scotland!

"I am hoping, at your leisure, to hear that ye both reached home, and found all belonging to ye as ye could wish; and I'm thinking that if Dennis wrote in French, I might make it out, for I've come by an old French Dictionary that was my father's. God save the shamrock! Your affectionate friend,

"ALISTER AUCHTERLAY.

"I am ill at saying all that I feel, but I'll never forget."

Dennis and I tramped from Liverpool. Partly for the walk, and partly because we were nearly penniless. His system, as I told him, seemed to be to empty his pockets first, and to think about how he was going to get along afterwards. However, it must be confessed that the number and the needs of the poor Irish we came across in connection with Biddy's death and its attendant ceremonies, were enough to be "the ruination" of a far less tender-hearted Paddy than Dennis O'Moore.

And so—a real sailor with a real bundle under my arm—I tramped Home.

Dennis had been a good comrade out in the world; but that was a trifle to the tact and sympathy he displayed when my mother and father and I were making fools of ourselves in each other's arms.

He saw everything, and he pretended he saw nothing. He picked up my father's spectacles, and waltzed with the dogs whilst the old gentleman was blowing his nose. When Martha broke down in hysterics (for which, it was not difficult to see, she would punish herself and us later on, with sulking and sandpaper), Dennis "brought her to" by an affectionate hugging, which, as she afterwards explained, seemed "that nateral" that she never realized its impropriety till it was twenty-four hours too late to remonstrate.

When my dear mother was calmer, and very anxious about our supper and beds, I ascertained from my father that the Woods were from home, and that Jem had gone down to the farm to sit for

an hour or so with Charlie; so, pending the preparation of our fatted calf, Dennis and I went to bring both Jem and Charlie back for the night.

It was a dark, moonless night, only tempered by the reflections of furnace fires among the hills. Dennis thought they were northern lights. The lane was cool, and fresh and damp, and full of autumn scents of fading leaves, and toadstools, and Herb Robert and late Meadow Sweet. And as we crossed the grass under the walnut-trees, I saw that the old schoolroom window was open to the evening air, and lighted from within.

I signalled silence to Dennis, and we crept up, as Jem and I had crept years ago to see the pale-faced relation hunting for the miser's will in the tea-caddy.

In the old arm-chair sat Charlie, propped with cushions. On one side of him Jem leant with elbows on the table, and on the other side sat Master Isaac, spectacles on nose.

The whole table was covered by a Map of the World, and Charlie's high, eager voice came clearly out into the night.

"Isaac and I have marked every step they've gone, Jem, but we don't think it would be lucky to make the back-mark over the Atlantic till they are quite safe Home."

Dennis says, in his teasing way, he never believed in my "athletics" till he saw me leap in through that window. He was not far behind.

"Jem!"

"Jack!"

When Jem released me and I looked round, Charlie was resting in Dennis O'Moore's arms and gazing up in his own odd, abrupt, searching way into the Irish boy's face.

"Isaac!" he half laughed, half sobbed: "Dennis is afraid of hurting this poor rickety body of mine. Come here, will you, and pinch me or pull my hair, that I may be sure it isn't all a dream!"

THE END.







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